

Operation “Denver”

The East German Ministry of State Security and the KGB’s AIDS Disinformation Campaign, 1985–1986 (Part 1)

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On 21 October 1985, Czechoslovakia’s foreign intelligence stations in Washington, DC, and New York received a directive from Prague regarding active measures—that is, covert psychological warfare.¹ They were to promote the new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev’s “peace offensive” in the run-up to his first summit meeting with U.S. President Ronald Reagan in Geneva in November 1985. At the same time, they were to discredit the Reagan administration’s “aggressive and militaristic” policies and in this way create a public contrast between Reagan and Gorbachev. The intelligence stations were to focus in particular on discrediting Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)—that is, his planned “Star Wars” defensive shield against incoming Soviet ballistic missiles.² The elimination of SDI was Gorbachev’s top foreign policy

1. The Soviet State Security Committee (KGB) and the East German State Security Ministry (MfS or Stasi) often used the terms “active measures” and “disinformation” interchangeably, although their official definitions of “active measures” encompassed a broader range of covert activities, mainly in the realm of psychological warfare. For the KGB definitions of “active measures” and “disinformation,” see Vasiliy Mitrokhin, *KGB Lexicon: The Soviet Intelligence Officer’s Handbook* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), pp. 13, 30. For the Stasi definition of “active measures,” see MfS, “IM-Richtline 2/79,” 8 December 1979, in Helmut Müller-Enbergs, ed., *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit*, Vol. 2, *Anleitungen für die Arbeit mit Agenten, Kundschaftern und Spionen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1998), p. 476. For the Stasi definition of “disinformation,” see Siegfried Suckut, ed., *Das Wörterbuch der Staatssicherheit: Definitionen zur politisch-operativen Arbeit* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1996), p. 88. As used in this article, “disinformation” refers to the deliberate spread of wholly or completely untrue information, especially by the Soviet-bloc security services, whereas “misinformation” leaves open the question of intent. Most conspiracy theorists in the United States, for example, tended to repeat unproven or disproved assertions regarding the origins of AIDS—that is, misinformation. They also tended to believe that the assertions they were spreading were true, in contrast to the KGB and the MfS.

2. Message for the Residencies in New York and Washington, 21 October 1985, in Archiv bezpečnostních složek (ABS), Prague, a. č. 90083/106, pp. 53–55. Regarding Gorbachev’s “peace offensive,” see Vladislav Zubok, “Why Did the Cold War End in 1989? Explanations of ‘The Turn,’” in

priority during his first two years in power. The Soviet leader worried that if SDI came to fruition, it would unleash another round of the U.S.-Soviet arms race—something that Moscow could ill afford.³

The instructions from Prague would not have come as a surprise to the Czechoslovak security service's great-power patron, the Soviet State Security Committee (KGB). The KGB's foreign intelligence division, the First Chief Directorate (FCD), and the latter's division for active measures, Service "A," had previously communicated these priorities to all the other Soviet-bloc intelligence services except for the Romanian.⁴ At the same time, the KGB had launched an initiative to augment the quality and quantity of active measures by its East European allies in early 1985.⁵ These efforts marked the KGB's response to several Soviet-bloc foreign and covert policy failures in 1983–1984, including the approval granted by Washington's West European allies for the stationing of U.S. long-range theater nuclear forces or "Euromissiles" on their territory and Reagan's reelection in a landslide in November 1984. This had happened despite the best diplomatic and propaganda efforts of the Soviet Foreign Ministry and the various organs of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The active measures of the KGB and its allies, especially in covert support of peace movements in the West, had also failed to have the desired effect.⁶ As Moscow struggled with the escalating costs of the nuclear arms race with the United States, along with the expense of its commitments overseas, the KGB threw itself and its allied services behind Gorbachev's various initiatives for arms control and redoubled its efforts to discredit and vilify the Reagan administration and its policies. To this end, the KGB and its allies should "expose" alleged U.S. efforts "to launch a nuclear war" and "to

Odd Arne Westad, ed., *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory* (London: F. Cass, 2000), pp. 349–350; and Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 296.

3. Zubok, "Why Did the Cold War End in 1989?," p. 349.

4. See, for example, Colonel Dimo Stankov, Head of Division 8 of the First Chief Directorate (FCD) of Bulgarian State Security (Durzhavna Sigurnost, DS) and Service "A" of the FCD of the KGB on the Active Measures (AM) Line, 9 December 1985, in Committee for Disclosing the Documents and Announcing Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens to the State Security and the Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian National Army (COMDOS), Fond (F.) 9, Opis (Op.) 4, A.E. 663, pp. 266, 271. Despite the document's date, the talks took place in August 1985.

5. Christopher Nehring, "Die Zusammenarbeit der DDR-Auslandsaufklärung mit der Aufklärung der Volksrepublik Bulgarien: Regionalfilialen des KGB?" Ph.D. Diss., University of Heidelberg, 2016, p. 163.

6. Regarding the failed efforts of Soviet leaders in 1983–1984, including the KGB's active measures, see Douglas Selvage and Walter Süß, *Staatsicherheit und KSZE-Prozess: MfS zwischen SED und KGB (1972–1989)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), pp. 435–447, 450–455.

conduct chemical and biological warfare”—requirements mentioned in the missive from Prague to its stations in Washington and New York.⁷

In the context of “discrediting” U.S. biological warfare, the missive from Prague in October 1985 contained a cryptic reference to a new disease: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).⁸ The KGB had recently launched an initiative that became one of its most successful propaganda efforts during the Cold War: its AIDS disinformation campaign. Evgenii Primakov, the head of the post-Soviet Russian successor agency to the KGB, confessed in 1992 that the KGB had initiated the campaign in the second half of the 1980s and then worked to spread the thesis internationally that the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), which causes AIDS, had originated in U.S. government experiments to develop a new biological weapon.⁹ According to this thesis, the AIDS virus had been created for deployment in a future war or against various unwanted groups and minorities inside and outside the United States. This HIV-as-U.S.-bioweapon conspiracy theory stands as one of the most tenacious conspiracy theories to have arisen in the twentieth century, and it continues to spread today, especially throughout the Internet.¹⁰

In current public discussions, both the fabricated thesis and its global proliferation are often attributed solely to Moscow and the KGB.¹¹ This suggests, incorrectly, that the Soviet Union must bear lone responsibility for the myth’s pernicious consequences. Nicoli Nattrass, director of the AIDS and Society Research Group at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, writes, “A growing body of research shows that AIDS conspiracy beliefs in the U.S. and South Africa are associated with risky sex, with not adhering to antiretroviral

7. Message for the Residencies in New York and Washington, 21 October 1985, pp. 53–55.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

9. “KGB Planted Story Tying US to AIDS, Russian Says,” *The Boston Globe*, 19 March 1992, p. 1.

10. The term “conspiracy theory” is used in this article in accordance with the popular understanding of the term—that is, it has a negative connotation and at least a hint of paranoia and irrationality. I do not deny that real conspiracies exist, but a conspiracy theory, according to my use, purports the existence of a conspiracy that did or does not exist. For a more detailed definition and analysis, see Jeffrey M. Bale, “Political Paranoia v. Political Realism: On Distinguishing between Bogus Conspiracy Theories and Genuine Conspiratorial Politics,” *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2007), pp. 50–53. The HIV-as-U.S.-bioweapon conspiracy theory regularly finds its way into contemporary listings of the most popular conspiracy theories. See, for example, “History’s Greatest Conspiracy Theories,” *The Telegraph*, 30 April 2018, p. 9; and “Die 21 besten Verschwörungstheorien,” *Tageszeitung (taz)*, 12 October 1998, p. 24. See also Nicoli Nattrass, *The AIDS Conspiracy: Science Fights Back* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 2.

11. See, for example, Adam B. Ellick, Adam Westbrook, and Jonah M. Kessel, “Operation Infektion: Meet the KGB Spies Who Invented Fake News,” special TimesVideo posted online by *The New York Times*, 12 November 2018, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/12/opinion/russia-meddling-disinformation-fake-news-elections.html>.

treatment, and with not testing for HIV”—all behaviors associated with higher HIV infection rates and thus a greater death toll.¹²

However, other groups, organizations, and individuals were also involved in spreading the conspiracy theory. Various actors around the world spread the conspiracy theory in the 1980s and beyond, whether under the influence of Soviet-bloc intelligence agencies; out of confusion or true conviction; in pursuit of personal, professional, or political gain; or because of a combination of such factors. Some of these individuals are discussed in this article. However, the article's main focus is on the KGB and the assistance provided to it by the East German Ministry for State Security (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*, MfS or Stasi) and its Main Directorate for Intelligence (*Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung*, HVA). During the period under discussion in this article, 1985–1986, the HVA mainly played a supporting role to the KGB. By 1987, as a second article will show, the HVA began to play an increasingly independent or even leading role in the disinformation campaign.

The analysis here of the HVA's role in the KGB's AIDS disinformation campaign, a campaign that even now continues to impede AIDS prevention and treatment, stands in contrast to the general portrayal of the East German foreign intelligence service in public debates and even scholarly publications in the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).¹³ The focus there has been on the HVA's successes in intelligence and counterintelligence, rather than its failures, and its role in Soviet-bloc active measures has rarely been examined.¹⁴ Some works have arguably helped to contribute to the legend of the HVA's charismatic, long-serving leader, Markus Wolf, who

12. Natrass, *AIDS Conspiracy*, p. 1. See also Laura M. Bogart and Sheryl Thorburn Bird, “Exploring the Relationship of Conspiracy Beliefs about HIV/AIDS to Sexual Behaviors and Attitudes among African-American Adults,” *Journal of the National Medical Association*, Vol. 95, No. 11 (2003), pp. 1057–1065; Laura M. Bogart and Sheryl Thorburn Bird, “Are HIV/AIDS Conspiracy Beliefs a Barrier to HIV Prevention among African Americans?,” *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes (JAIDS)*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (2005), pp. 213–218; M. Ross, J. Essien, and I. Torres, “Conspiracy Beliefs about the Origin of HIV/AIDS in Four Racial Groups,” *JAIDS*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (2006), pp. 342–344; E. Grebe and N. Natrass, “AIDS Conspiracy Beliefs and Unsafe Sex in Cape Town,” *AIDS and Behavior*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2012), pp. 761–763; L. Bogart et al., “Conspiracy Beliefs about HIV are Related to Antiretroviral Treatment Non-adherence among African-American Men with HIV,” *JAIDS*, Vol. 53, No. 5 (2010), pp. 648–655; and A. S. Bohnert and C. A. Latkin, “HIV Testing and Conspiracy Beliefs Regarding the Origins of HIV among African Americans,” *AIDS Patient Care and STDs*, Vol. 23, No. 9 (2009), pp. 759–763.

13. As Uwe Spiekermann notes, there has been an unwarranted tendency to treat the HVA separately from the MfS, to which it belonged, and to downplay its contributions to domestic repression. See Uwe Spiekermann, “Introduction: The Stasi and the HVA Contemporary Research and Contemporary Resonance,” *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, Supplement 9 (2014), pp. 20–21.

14. See, for example, the contributions regarding the HVA in Thomas Wegener Friis, Kristie Macrakis, and Helmut Müller-Enbergs, eds., *East German Foreign Intelligence: Myth, Reality, and Controversy* (New York: Routledge, 2010), especially the introduction by the editors on p. 4. An exception that

launched his own successful public-relations campaign regarding his agency and its exploits after the collapse of East German Communism in 1989.¹⁵ During a visit to Italy in 1998, Wolf acknowledged that the HVA had played a role in spreading the HIV-as-U.S.-bioweapon thesis at the behest of the KGB as part of its active measures.¹⁶ His statement came at a time when the dangerous side effects of the disinformation thesis for AIDS prevention and treatment were just becoming clear. Wolf defended the HVA’s role: “Just like large sections of the public,” he had considered the truthfulness of the HIV-as-U.S.-bioweapon thesis “to be an absolute given.”¹⁷ Wolf’s successor as head of the HVA in 1986, Werner Großmann, has sought, for his part, to deny or hush up any discussion of the HVA’s role in the campaign.¹⁸ However,

looks at HVA failures is George Herbstritt, “Aspects of Crisis and Decline of East German Foreign Intelligence in the 1980s,” in Uwe Spiekermann, ed., *The Stasi at Home and Abroad*, pp. 139–150. Exceptions that look at the Stasi’s role in Soviet-bloc active measures include Michael F. Scholz, “Active Measures and Disinformation as Part of East Germany’s Propaganda War, 1953–1972,” in Friis, Macarakis, and Müller-Enbergs, eds., *East German Foreign Intelligence*, pp. 113–133; Peter Busch, “The ‘Vietnam Legion’: West German Psychological Warfare against East German Propaganda in the 1960s,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Summer 2014), pp. 164–189; Douglas Selvage “Operation Synonym: Soviet-Bloc Active Measures and the Helsinki Process, 1976–1983,” in Włodzław Bułhak and Thomas Wegener Friis, eds., *Need to Know: Eastern and Western Perspectives* (Odense: University of Southern Denmark Press, 2014), pp. 81–96; and Nehring, “Die Zusammenarbeit der DDR-Auslandsaufklärung,” pp. 148–304.

15. See, for example, Kristie Macarakis, “Markus Wolf: From the Shadows to the Limelight,” in Paul Maddrell et al., eds., *Spy Chiefs, Volume 2: Intelligence Leaders in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), ch. 7. Perhaps the most important part of Wolf’s public relations campaign was his autobiography: Markus Wolf, *Man without a Face: The Autobiography of Communism’s Greatest Spymaster* (New York: Times Books, 1997).

16. Wolf declared in a public lecture: “Around the time that I was about to leave the service in the fall of 1986, the division for ‘active measures’ [i.e., HVA/X] received from its partner in the Soviet intelligence service [some] material with the indication to help contribute to its spread in the West. It purported that the HIV-virus had been developed in a secret laboratory for gene technology in the USA, its effectiveness had been tested on prisoners, and in this way, it had first been spread outside and into the rest of the world.” Markus Wolf, “L’arte della simulazione: Thesen für ein Podiumsgespräch der Accademia KOS in Mailand, März 1998,” in Markus Wolf and Günther Drommer, eds., *Die Kunst der Verstellung: Dokumente, Gespräche, Interviews* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 1998), p. 12. The German publication does not indicate that this was not the complete version of Wolf’s lecture. Missing passages can be found in the Italian translation of his lecture: “Io, magnifico bugiardo: L’Arte della simulazione,” *Venerdì di Repubblica*, No. 860 (May 1998), pp. 55–61. Although Wolf in his public lecture arguably left open whether HVA/X had done what the Soviet “friends” had wanted, he was much more forthright in an interview with an Italian newspaper during his visit, stating: “In the case of the AIDS epidemic: initially, we spread the rumor that a virus had escaped from secret American laboratories.” See “Il vangelo delle spie secondo Markus,” *La Repubblica* (Rome), 1 April 1998, p. 42. My thanks to Enrico Speranza of the Italian Committee for Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal and Pseudoscience for bringing these articles to my attention.

17. Wolf, “L’arte della simulazione,” p. 12.

18. Werner Großmann and Wolfgang Schwanitz, eds., *Fragen an das MfS: Auskünfte über eine Behörde* (Berlin: Edition Ost, 2010), pp. 254–255; and Erhard Geissler and Robert Hunt Sprinkle, “Disinformation Squared: Was the HIV-from-Fort-Detrick Myth a Stasi Success?,” *Politics and the Life Sciences*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Fall 2013), p. 24.

this article confirms that not only was the disinformation division (Roman numeral “X”—HVA/X) directly involved in the disinformation campaign, as Wolf confessed, but so, too, was its Sector for Science and Technology (*Sektor Wissenschaft und Technik*, HVA/SWT), which thus subordinated scientific truth—at least abroad—to larger covert-policy goals.¹⁹

One advantage that the HVA’s former officers have had in influencing research and public discussion of their former activities, in contrast to other divisions of the MfS, was their success in late 1989 and early 1990 in destroying most of their operational files—all told, around 90 percent of all the files regarding their activities, including files potentially related to the AIDS disinformation campaign.²⁰ The HVA first became associated with the disinformation campaign in 1992 only because two former officers from HVA/X, Gunther Bohnsack and Herbert Brehmer, broke with the general code of silence among former HVA officers regarding their former agency’s less-edifying activities. They claimed in their memoirs that the HVA, under orders from Moscow, had manipulated Soviet–East German scientist Jakob Segal into preparing a “scientific” study supporting and expanding on Moscow’s original AIDS disinformation thesis.²¹ After Bohnsack, whose unit was not directly responsible for the AIDS disinformation campaign, made additional, misleading statements in the early 2000s about the disinformation campaign that found their way into the scholarly literature, questions arose again regarding what role the HVA had played—if any—in the campaign.²² This prompted biological and chemical weapons expert Erhard Geissler not only to dismiss all of Bohnsack’s

19. HVA/SWT was thus engaged in more, at least in this case, than “stealing scientific and technical secrets” in the West and producing “James Bond-like technology to support espionage and security.” See Kristie Macrakis, *Seduced by Secrets: Inside the Stasi’s Spy-Tech World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. I.

20. On the destruction of the HVA’s files, see Hubertus Knabe, *West-Arbeit des MfS: Das Zusammenspiel von “Aufklärung” und “Abwehr”* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1999), p. 133.

21. Günter Bohnsack and Herbert Brehmer, *Auftrag: Irreführung: Wie die Stasi Politik im Westen machte* (Hamburg: Carlsen, 1992), pp. 219–220.

22. Geissler debunks two such claims from Bohnsack that CIA historian Thomas Boghardt repeats in his article on the AIDS disinformation campaign: (1) that SED leaders were “delighted” to see Segal’s thesis included in the final conference report of the NAM summit meeting; and (2) that HVA officers posing as U.S. diplomats—actually as undercover Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) agents—visited Segal so he would “conclude that his theory had struck a nerve in Washington.” See Thomas Boghardt, “Operation INFektION: Soviet Bloc Intelligence and Its AIDS Disinformation Campaign,” *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (2009), pp. 9, 12. Geissler notes that no mention of Segal’s thesis, let alone AIDS, is included in the NAM meeting’s final report. Moreover, two U.S. diplomats serving in the East Berlin embassy, whom Segal had dubbed CIA agents, had indeed visited the Segals to learn more about their views—that is, Segal’s visitors were not HVA officers in disguise. See Geissler and Sprinkle, “Disinformation Squared,” pp. 44–51; and Erhard Geissler, “The AIDS Disinformation Campaign Continues and Bears Rotten Fruit: Part II,” *The ASA [Applied Science and Analysis] Newsletter*, No. 2 (2010), pp. 16–19. The AIDS disinformation campaign (“Denver”) fell

previous statements as unproven but also to argue that the alleged *absence of evidence* in the Stasi archives regarding the HVA’s role constituted *evidence of the HVA’s absence* from the AIDS disinformation campaign in any meaningful way—a classic logical fallacy, an *argumentum ad ignorantiam*.²³ Geissler held to this argument despite knowing that the HVA’s files had been almost totally destroyed—which could plausibly explain the absence of relevant files in Berlin—and even when confronted by new evidence of the HVA’s involvement that came to light in the 2010s.²⁴

This evidence emerged via the opening of archives of the former state security organs in the other former Warsaw Pact countries. The HVA had destroyed most of its own files, but its “fraternal organs” in Prague and Sofia—and to some extent, Warsaw—had preserved records of their dealings with the HVA. In the secret-police archives in Bulgaria, the historian Christopher Nehring found correspondence and records of meetings of the Bulgarian active-measures division with the KGB’s Service “A” and HVA/X that discussed their respective roles in the AIDS disinformation campaign.²⁵ Nehring’s findings in Sofia, along with a closer examination of records from other Stasi units and the HVA’s databases at the Stasi Records Archives, enabled me to locate new materials in Berlin regarding the role of the HVA (and

under the aegis of Hans Pfeifer’s division, HVA/X/1. See Objekt-Vorgang (OVO) “Denver,” Reg.-Nr. XV 3429/86, in Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (BStU), AR 2, MfS, RoHo, F22. Since 1978, Bohnsack had been the Director of Division 7 of HVA/X (HVA/X/7), responsible for influencing the foreign trade policy of West Germany or, alternatively, undermining the FRG’s economy and trade through active measures. See Helmut Müller-Enbergs, “Hauptverwaltung A (HV A): Aufgaben—Strukturen—Quellen,” in *MfS-Handbuch* (Berlin: BStU, 2011), p. 179.

23. Geissler and Sprinkle, “Disinformation Squared,” pp. 77–78. Regarding “arguments from ignorance” (*argumenta ad ignorantiam*), see Douglas Walton, “Nonfallacious Arguments from Ignorance,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (October 1992), pp. 381–387. Walton argues that such arguments need not be fallacious if one can assume that the knowledge base for the given argument is complete (p. 381). Given the destruction of the vast majority of the relevant “knowledge base” in this case—that is, the HVA’s files—an “argument from ignorance” still constitutes a logical fallacy.

24. Geissler and Sprinkle write, “Many HVA documents, maybe most, were intentionally destroyed after the peaceful revolution in East Germany in 1990. . . . Documents related to any HIV campaign might have been included in the cull.” See Geissler and Sprinkle, “Disinformation Squared,” p. 78. They seek to downplay the significance of this destruction of evidence by claiming that “many putatively missing HVA filings would have been filed also by HA II [Hauptabteilung or Main Division II, responsible for domestic counterintelligence] or other department which either received messages from, or sent messages to, HVA/X” (p. 78). This ignores the well-known principle of compartmentalization in intelligence services. Some secret information was shared within the MfS—as within the KGB, the CIA, and so on—strictly on a need-to-know basis. See James J. Wirth, “The American Approach to Intelligence Studies,” in Loch K. Johnson, ed., *Handbook of Intelligence Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 33. For Geissler’s response to the information that emerged in the 2010s, see Erhard Geißler, “Es gab keine AIDS-Verschwörung des MfS mit den Segals,” *Zeitschrift des Forschungverbundes SED-Staat*, Vol. 37 (2015), pp. 94–121.

25. Nehring consulted the COMDOS archives in Sofia.

the MfS in general) in the KGB's AIDS disinformation campaign. In 2014, the results of this research were published in a German-language study.²⁶

The present article summarizes and updates, for an English-speaking audience, several of the conclusions reached in the earlier study regarding the KGB's AIDS disinformation campaign and the Stasi's involvement in it during the years 1985–1986. It also provides new insights into the origins, evolution, and popularity of the disinformation campaign's underlying conspiracy theory that the U.S. government originally developed HIV/AIDS as a bioweapon. Although some authors have overstated the role of the Stasi (and even the KGB) in explaining the origins and staying power of the conspiracy theory, documentary evidence from the Bulgarian, Czechoslovak, and East German State Security archives conclusively shows that the HVA and Stasi took part in the KGB's AIDS disinformation campaign in 1985–1986, if only in a supporting role.

Origins of the AIDS Disinformation Campaign: The KGB and U.S. Conspiracy Theories

On 7 September 1985, the KGB informed its “comrades” in Bulgarian foreign intelligence of a new, major disinformation campaign:

We are carrying out a complex of [active] measures in connection with the appearance in recent years of a new dangerous disease in the USA, “Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome—AIDS” ... and its subsequent, rampant spread to other countries, including Western Europe. The goal of the measures is to create a favorable opinion for us abroad—namely, that this disease is the result of secret experiments by the USA's secret services and the Pentagon with new types of biological weapons that have spun out of control.²⁷

The apparent public launch of the KGB's campaign came on 30 October 1985, when the Soviet newspaper *Literaturnaya gazeta* (Literary Gazette, LG), a known outlet for KGB disinformation, published an article titled “Panic in the West, or What Is Hiding behind the Sensation Surrounding AIDS?” The author of the article, Valentin Vasilevich Zapevalov, extensively cited a July 1983 article from the Indian newspaper *Patriot*, another known outlet of

26. Douglas Selvage and Christopher Nehring, *AIDS-Verschwörung: Das Ministerium für Staatssicherheit und die AIDS-Desinformationskampagne des KGB* ((Berlin: BStU, 2014)).

27. KGB, Information Nr. 2955 (Russian), 7 September 1985, in COMDOS, F. 9, Op. 4, A.E. 663, p. 208.

KGB disinformation. Under the headline “AIDS May Invade India: Mystery Disease Caused by U.S. Experiments,” the *Patriot* had published an alleged letter from an anonymous yet “well-known American scientist and anthropologist” in New York claiming that the Pentagon had developed the AIDS virus in collaboration with the U.S. government’s Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as part of its biological weapons program.²⁸

Based on the *Patriot* article, the KGB has been credited as the originator of the HIV-as-U.S.-bioweapon thesis, but in fact the assertions in *Patriot* in 1983 and *LG* in 1985 did not go much beyond conspiracy theories already circulating within the gay community in the United States at the time.²⁹ For example, on 9 July 1983, the Boston *Gay Community News* published an article by Charlie Shively, a radical gay-rights activist and one of the newspaper’s founders and editors, that placed responsibility for the AIDS epidemic squarely on the U.S. government.³⁰ In the article, Shively cited a theory from another leading gay newspaper, the *New York Native*, that the AIDS virus had originated in the African Swine Fever Virus (ASFV). The *Native* had also reported allegations that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had brought the African virus into the Western Hemisphere for biological warfare against Cuba. The U.S. government, Shively wrote, had hoped the ASFV would remain isolated in Cuba, but the virus had then spread to Haiti and the United States. Because of the high cost to the U.S. government of combatting the resulting swine fever epidemic—an \$18 million indemnity for the slaughter of pigs in Haiti alone—Shively posed the question, “Would it be possible that—given \$100 million—the doctors would just decide to kill all the queers, Haitians, and IV [intravenous] drug users exposed to AIDS?”³¹

The “doctors” in this case were the medical researchers at the CDC, whom Shively blamed (incorrectly) for the infamous Tuskegee syphilis study in which the U.S. Public Health Service had observed the long-term effects of syphilis on infected African-American sharecroppers for four decades, from 1932 to 1972, without providing them with effective medical treatment.³²

28. “AIDS May Invade India: Mystery Disease Caused by US Experiments,” *Patriot* (New Delhi), 17 July 1983, p. 1. The CDC, originally known as the Center for Disease Control until 1980, was renamed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 1992.

29. Natrass, *AIDS Conspiracy*, pp. 34, 69.

30. Regarding Shively, see Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, *Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York: Touchstone, 1999), pp. 313–314.

31. Charley Shively, “Speaking Out: The CDC-CIA-AIDS Political Alliance,” *Gay Community News* (Boston), 9 July 1983, p. 5.

32. For more on Tuskegee, see James H. Jones, *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment*, rev. and expanded ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1993). Although the *New York Native* had indeed reported

Shively also insinuated that AIDS might be an “ethnic weapon” developed by the Pentagon. He based this accusation on a somewhat distorted version of the 1969 testimony of a Defense Department official, Donald MacArthur, before the U.S. Congress. MacArthur had asserted that “within a period of 5 to 10 years, it would be possible to produce a synthetic biological agent, an agent that does not naturally exist and for which no natural immunity could have been acquired.”³³ Nearly all AIDS conspiracy theorists, both then and today, as well as the KGB and Stasi in their disinformation, have cited MacArthur’s 1969 testimony as “proof” of a U.S. government conspiracy to construct the AIDS virus.

Why did Shively and others within the gay community at this time spread such lurid conspiracy theories about the alleged role of the U.S. government in spreading the AIDS epidemic? Given the rapid spread of the AIDS virus, the hesitant reaction of the Reagan administration in combatting it, and the openly homophobic proclamations of many of the administration’s members and supporters, it was hardly surprising that the gay community would question the U.S. government’s motivations and policies with regard to AIDS.³⁴ Illogical or not, it was a small step from arguing that the administration was not doing enough to combat AIDS to arguing that it somehow stood behind the AIDS epidemic or sought to fuel it. Moreover, like most conspiracy theories, the HIV-as-U.S.-bioweapon thesis was based on an element of truth, or at least “truthiness.” The AIDS pandemic, the ensuing conspiracy theories regarding its origins, and the KGB’s disinformation campaign arose at a time when the U.S. government was facing increased criticism at home and abroad. This was due not only to the Vietnam War and Watergate scandal but also to revelations in the 1970s of illegal (or at least legally questionable) activities in fighting the Cold War both domestically and internationally. In the mid-1970s the Church Committee had revealed disconcerting information about the CIA’s covert operations, including its experiments with lysergic acid diethylamide (better known as LSD) on individuals without their consent as

in 1983 about a potential connection between HIV and AFSV, along with Cuba’s accusations against the CIA, it had not concluded that there was a hidden “alliance” or conspiracy. Shively had apparently reached his own conclusions. See James E. D’Eramo, “African Swine Fever Virus, Part II,” *New York Native*, 6–19 June 1983, pp. 18–19.

33. U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on the Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Appropriations for 1970, Part 5: Research, Development, Test and Evaluation*, 91st Cong., 1st sess., 1969, p. 129.

34. Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People and the AIDS Epidemic*, 20th anniversary ed. (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007), pp. 324–329, 359–360, 363–364, 397–399, 466–468, 492–495, 502–503, 525–527, 585–590.

part of Project MK Ultra.³⁵ Also revealed were various assassination attempts, including the plan to assassinate Congolese President Patrice Lumumba with a toxin delivered to Congo by the CIA.³⁶ The revelation of these real conspiracies by the “national security state,” previously hidden from public view, helped inspire speculation about other, still-hidden conspiracies within the U.S. government. This was especially the case among marginalized groups in U.S. society that had been victims of government repression.

Shively saw the gay community and its sexuality under attack by the U.S. government and sought to rally the community to defend itself. He wrote at the end of his article, “Instead of checking out the CIA, the CDC or the medical-pharmacological establishment, too many gay people readily surrender to the lie that our sexuality is crippling us. They say our sex is adolescent, compulsive, retarded, irresponsible, sinful and dreadful.”³⁷ Shively’s article confirms that the HIV-as-U.S.-bioweapon conspiracy theory was already spreading within the gay community in the United States before the *Patriot* article and the KGB’s apparent adoption of it. The popularity of the theory among some community members is in keeping with a major school of explanations of how conspiracy theories originate and how they spread. Anthropologist Alexander Rödlach writes, “Conspiracy theories are prevalent in groups that have endured harmful assaults from outsiders. Experiencing discrimination, disempowerment, and other demeaning conditions helps to explain the formulation and acceptance of conspiracy theories.”³⁸ That is, among oppressed and marginalized groups in a given society, the purveying of conspiracy theories serves as a type of self-defense against discrimination and perceived outside attack. In such cases, conspiracy theories represent a type of misinformation; the propagators generally believe the false information is in fact true.

The KGB, however, was pursuing other goals, as its telegram to Sofia makes clear. The agency’s main strategic goal in the longer term was to discredit the United States internationally, and in the shorter term it sought to raise questions about the (ostensibly defensive) U.S. biological weapons

35. U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Foreign and Military Intelligence: Final Report, Book 1*, 94th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1976, pp. 389–403.

36. U.S. Congress, Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Interim Report: Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders*, 94th Cong., 1st sess. 1975, pp. 19–30. In the report, Gottlieb is called by his birth name, Joseph Scheider.

37. Shively, “Speaking Out.”

38. Alexander Rödlach, *Witches, Westerners and HIV: AIDS and Cultures of Blame in Africa* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2006), p. 114.

program.³⁹ This conforms to another major school of explanation for the origins and spread of conspiracy theories, which stresses how political extremists of the Left and Right create conspiracy theories or instrumentalize existing ones to demonize real or perceived ideological opponents by creating “images of the enemy” (*Feindbilder*) that justify radical political action or even violence against the group or state in question. Most often—as with the KGB in this case—the propagators of conspiracy theories know that the information is false, although their theories can also gradually become part of a larger system of ideological beliefs held by the given political extremists.⁴⁰

Although the HIV-as-U.S.-bioweapon thesis was not a KGB creation, the articles in *Patriot* and *LG* added a new twist to the various conspiracy theories already spreading in the United States by specifying the location at which the virus or viruses causing AIDS had supposedly been weaponized: the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID) at Fort Detrick, Maryland. Zapevalov’s article—in keeping with the KGB’s guidelines in its telegram to the Bulgarian DS—claimed that the virus resulting from the Pentagon’s experiments was inflicted on an unsuspecting world after it had been tested on unwitting individuals—drug addicts, homosexuals, the homeless, and people from the U.S. “satellite country” of Haiti.⁴¹ Whereas the HIV-as-U.S.-bioweapon thesis had arisen “naturally” within the gay community in the United States, the Fort Detrick thesis—that HIV had been weaponized at USAMRIID—apparently came from Moscow and the KGB.

Why did the KGB wait until 1985 to launch its disinformation campaign? The publication in *Patriot* had apparently served in 1983 as a lone active measure, designed by Moscow to fuel existing tensions between the United States and Pakistan on the one side and India on the other.⁴² In 1985, the KGB decided to redeploy the *Patriot* article to a new, broader front on the basis of new developments. In February 1985, a U.S. government report had accused the Soviet Union of producing biological weapons in violation

39. KGB, Information Nr. 2955, 7 September 1985.

40. Eckhard Jesse, “Feindbilder im Extremismus,” in Uwe Backes, Alexander Gallus, and Eckhard Jesse, eds., *Jahrbuch Extremismus und Demokratie*, Vol. 23 (Berlin: BfV, 2011), pp. 13–36; and Uwe Backes and Eckhard Jesse, *Politischer Extremismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, 4th ed. (Bonn: Propyläen Verlag, 1996), p. 257.

41. “AIDS May Invade India,” p. 1.

42. Boghardt, “Operation INFektION,” p. 5; and “Pentagon Said Pursuing CBW Research in Lahore,” Moscow Radio Peace and Progress in English, 13 December 1986, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), *Daily Report, Soviet Union*, FBIS-SOV-86-246, 23 December 1986, p. A3. The Pentagon, the *Patriot* article had claimed, would soon move its experiments from the United States to neighboring Pakistan, where they would pose a threat to India. See “AIDS May Invade India,” p. 1.

of the Geneva Conventions.⁴³ In October 1985, the magazine of the perennial crackpot presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche, *Executive Intelligence Review*, declared that the Soviet Union was exploiting AIDS as an offensive bioweapon by somehow contributing to its spread in the West.⁴⁴ Zapevalov referred to the article in *Executive Intelligence Review* and accused the LaRouche organization—without any evidence—of cooperation with the CIA.⁴⁵ There was also broader pressure within the KGB to strike back after the failures of its active-measures campaigns to stop the stationing of U.S. “Euromissiles” or to prevent Reagan’s reelection.

The KGB had apparently hoped that the Zapevalov article would provoke a reaction from the West, especially from the Western press. This was one of the goals of Soviet-bloc active measures. Even negative publicity or government denials were considered useful in the KGB playbook because they gave the original active measure or disinformation thesis more publicity. For some contrarians, a denial by the U.S. government was construed as confirmation for the original active-measure thesis.⁴⁶ The KGB’s attitude toward active measures was similar to that of many entertainers and reality stars nowadays to scandals and accusations, preferring to be in the news rather than ignored.

In East Berlin, KGB liaison officer Vitalii Lyamin, responsible for co-ordinating operations with the Stasi’s divisions for foreign disinformation (HVA/X) and domestic agitation and propaganda, requested on 12 November 1985 that the latter provide him with all known reactions in the Western press to Zapevalov’s article.⁴⁷ The Western press, he said, might decide to

43. Boghardt, “Operation INFEKTION,” p. 6.

44. See Warren J. Hamerman, “AIDS Epidemic Explodes: What Is the Russian Angle?,” *Executive Intelligence Review* (EIR), Vol. 12, No. 41 (18 October 1985), pp. 52–54.

45. Valentin Zapevalov, “Panika na zapade, ili shto skrivaets’ za sensatsei vokrug AIDS,” *Literaturnaya gazeta* (LG) (Moscow), 30 October 1985, p. 14. There is no evidence that the link posited by Zapevalov actually existed.

46. See Douglas Selvage, “Operation Synonym: Soviet-Bloc Active Measures and the Helsinki Process, 1976–1983,” in Władysław Bulhak and Thomas Wegener Friis, eds., *Need to Know: Eastern and Western Perspectives* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2014), pp. 92–93.

47. See Handwritten Notes (apparently from an officer from ZAIG/6), 12 November 1985, in BStU, MfS, ZAIG, Nr. 14413, p. 47. Lyamin’s request came in response to a direct order from the KGB Center in Moscow. See [KGB], Telegram 1666/85, n.d., in BStU, MfS, ZAIG, Nr. 14413, p. 48. Regarding Lyamin’s role in general, see the note from Colonel Miermeister, ZAIG/6 to the Director of the ZAIG, 14 May 1985, in BStU, MfS, ZAIG, Nr. 14413, p. 67. “ZAIG/6” refers to Section 6 of the *Zentrale Auswertungs- und Informationsgruppe* (Central Evaluation and Information Group, ZAIG) of the MfS. In 1985, the former Division for Agitation (*Abteilung Agitation*) of the MfS had been integrated into ZAIG as Section 6. See Roger Engelmann und Frank Joestel, “Die Zentrale Auswertungs- und Informationsgruppe,” in *MfS-Handbuch* (Berlin: BStU, 2009), p. 84. Lyamin had a storied history as a KGB officer. In the early 1950s, he had worked as an illegal in the United States under the codename “DIM” or “DIMA,” and from the end of the 1970s until his appointment to

“hush up” (*totschweigen*) the existence of the article and its thesis. Lyamin was also interested in alternative explanations regarding the origin of AIDS that “the Yankees [*Amis*] might have spread or may be spreading” in the Western press.⁴⁸ The Stasi complied with Lyamin’s request and provided him with relevant (yet unspecified) materials.⁴⁹

The KGB “Center” in Moscow was growing frustrated with the lack of response to its Fort Detrick thesis in the United States. In a follow-up article on 13 November 1985 titled “Why the USA Press Is Silent,” *LG* wrote:

It has been well-known for a long time, and it has been confirmed repeatedly: Every time that an article is published that brings to light a subversive activity of the CIA or Pentagon, an order for silence goes out in Washington, and the “free American press” follows this order.⁵⁰

Two days later the U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, Arthur Hartman, officially protested against the Zapevalov article in a letter to the editors of *LG*, but his letter was not published.⁵¹ The KGB apparently decided that a rebuff to the letter would not suffice to fuel its disinformation campaign.

Co-Evolution: The KGB and LaRouche Versions of the HIV-as-Bioweapon Thesis

More interesting and useful to the KGB was the response of LaRouche and his associates to the Zapevalov article. At this time, a cycle of misinformation and disinformation arose between conspiracy theorists in the United States and those in the United Kingdom—especially individuals associated with LaRouche—and various publications promoted by the KGB or the Soviet government in general. Two major strains of the HIV-as-bioweapon thesis had, as it were, begun to evolve: a version promoted by LaRouche and his associates and a version promoted by Moscow and the KGB.

the KGB mission to the GDR in Karlshorst he had served as director of Division 3 of Service “S,” where he had prepared KGB reservists for work as illegals in the West. See Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 157; and Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge University, Vasili Mitrokhin Papers, MITN 1/5, p. 196.

48. See Handwritten Notes, 12 November 1985, p. 47.

49. See Handwritten Notes (apparently from an officer in ZAIG/6), 29 November 1985, in BStU, MfS, ZAIG, Nr. 14413, p. 47.

50. “Pochemu mlochit pressa SShA,” *LG*, 13 November 1985, p. 2.

51. U.S. Department of State (U.S. DOS), *Soviet Influence Activities: A Report on Active Measures and Propaganda, 1986–1987* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987), pp. 48–49.

In November 1985, LaRouche’s *Executive Intelligence Review* reprinted Zapevalov’s article in English translation under the title, “Text of Admissions by the Russians.”⁵² Warren J. Hamerman, the chair of LaRouche’s “Biological Holocaust Task Force,” claimed that the article marked Moscow’s response to LaRouche’s earlier accusations.⁵³ According to Hamerman, Moscow had confirmed with its article “the possibility that the AIDS virus could have been ‘bioengineered’ and worked up into a weapon in a military laboratory.”⁵⁴ However, Hamerman turned Moscow’s accusation on its head. He now wrote of “overwhelming circumstantial evidence” of “direct Soviet involvement in spreading AIDS in the West.”⁵⁵ That is, Moscow had somehow arranged for the bioengineering or weaponization of the AIDS virus and then spread it throughout the United States and Western Europe. Hamerman insinuated that the World Health Organization (WHO), allegedly dominated by the Soviet Union, had played a key role.⁵⁶

London venereologist John Seale, whom Hamerman had previously interviewed in support of his contention that the AIDS epidemic was providing Moscow with a strategic advantage over the West, spoke more specifically in December 1985 about the alleged “bioengineering” of the AIDS virus.⁵⁷ He claimed that HIV had been genetically engineered by adding a gene to the visna virus, a microbe that attacks sheep. However, in contrast to Hamerman and Zapevalov, he initially left open the question of whether the Soviet Union or the United States had genetically engineered the virus.⁵⁸ Seale’s claim was quickly picked up by Radio Moscow’s World Service on 26 December, which

52. “Text of Admissions by the Russians,” *EIR*, Vol. 12, No. 46 (22 November 1985), pp. 8–9.

53. Christopher R. Tourney, *Conjuring Science: Scientific Symbols and Cultural Meanings in American Life* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), p. 91.

54. Warren J. Hamerman, “Soviets Attack LaRouche for Exposé of AIDS Cover-Up,” *EIR*, Vol. 12, No. 46 (22 November 1985), p. 6.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

57. “Interview: Dr. John Seale—AIDS and the Security of the West,” *EIR*, Vol. 12, No. 41 (18 October 1985), pp. 54–57; and Hamerman, “AIDS Epidemic Exploses,” pp. 52–54.

58. Andrew Veitch, “Germ of Doubt: Is AIDS a Test-Tube Baby?,” *Guardian* (London), 20 December 1985, p. 15; and “Interview: Dr. John Seale,” pp. 54–57. That Seale and subsequent proponents of the HIV-as-bioweapon thesis pointed to Visna is not surprising. Both HIV and Visna are retroviruses, and Visna was the first virus discovered in the family of lentiviruses (slow-progressing viruses), to which HIV was later found to belong. Because of this, early AIDS research focused on the potential relationship between Visna and HIV—a fact published in AIDS research at the time. See, for example, Luc Montagnier, *Virus: The Co-Discoverer of HIV Tracks Its Rampage and Charts the Future* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), pp. 59, 77–78; and Mirko Dražen Grmek, *History of AIDS: Emergence and Origin of a Modern Pandemic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 77.

declared it to be proof of the Fort Detrick thesis.⁵⁹ More importantly, Seale had unintentionally added a new element to the Soviet thesis. Whereas Soviet propaganda until then had simply spoken of a “mixing” of viruses and their weaponization at Fort Detrick, the KGB now added the element of genetic engineering to its thesis. This addition attracted a potential new audience to the KGB thesis: opponents of the new technology of genetic engineering, some of whom saw in the AIDS-origin thesis proof of their fears.⁶⁰

Seale inspired the KGB in the further development of its enhanced conspiracy theory, and he also inspired a California doctor, Robert Strecker, who, along with his brother Theodore, developed an alternative HIV-as-bioweapon conspiracy theory: According to the Streckers, HIV had been genetically engineered by recombining the visna virus with the bovine leukemia virus.⁶¹ Moreover, although the genetic engineering had taken place at Fort Detrick, it had not occurred under the auspices of the Pentagon; instead, the U.S. National Institutes for Health (NIH) and National Cancer Institute (NCI), infiltrated by Soviet agents via the WHO, had overseen the operation. The WHO and the NIH, the Streckers claimed, had spread the virus, in accordance with Soviet plans, to “unknowing Africans” through inoculations, to hemophiliacs through contaminated blood transfusions, and to the poor in the U.S. South through “free shots.”⁶² The Streckers’ thesis had more influence in the United States, especially with subsequent conspiracy theorists, than either Seale’s ideas or the subsequent version of the HIV-as-bioweapon conspiracy theory developed by Jakob Segal and his wife, Lilli Segal, which the KGB and Stasi sought to promote internationally.⁶³

59. Zhores Medvedev, “AIDS Virus Infection: A Soviet View of Its Origin,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine (JRSM)*, Vol. 79 (August 1986), p. 494.

60. Geissler and Sprinkle, “Disinformation Squared,” p. 8.

61. Robert B. Strecker, “Letter to the Editor: Aids Virus Infection,” *JRSM*, Vol. 79 (September 1986), pp. 559–560. Strecker hinted in an interview with another AIDS conspiracy theorist, Leonard Horowitz, that he had been influenced by Seale’s “research.” See Leonard G. Horowitz, *Emerging Viruses: AIDS & Ebola: Nature, Accident or Intentional?* (Rockport, MA: Tetrahedon, 1996), p. 104.

62. Theodore A. Strecker, “This Is a Bio-Attack Alert,” *The Strecker Memorandum*, 28 March 1986, available online at <http://www.streckermemorandum.com/bio-attack-alert.htm>.

63. For example, Nattrass concluded, based on her exchanges with David Gilbert, a former “Weatherman,” convicted bank robber, and prison peer counselor for HIV/AIDS, that the Segals’ disinformation thesis especially influenced African-American prison inmates through the writings of rightwing militia leader William Campbell Douglass, who promoted his own version of the HIV-as-U.S.-bioweapon conspiracy theory. Gilbert remembered the Segals’ thesis from leftwing publications he had read in the 1980s. See Nattrass, *AIDS Conspiracy*, pp. 4, 28–29. In fact, Douglass cited Strecker, not the Segals, in his own published version of the conspiracy theory. He, like Strecker, also specified Fort Detrick as the location at which the Communist-dominated WHO, in collaboration with NIH, had constructed the virus. Thus, the KGB’s Fort Detrick thesis had influenced Douglass via Strecker, who

Seale’s more important contribution, at least for the purposes of LaRouche (and many U.S. conservatives demanding widespread AIDS testing of individuals), was his casual-contact thesis. The AIDS virus, Seale and then LaRouche argued, could be spread through saliva and insects, not just through sexual contact, and this finding had supposedly been covered up by scientists and the medical profession—that is, it was yet another conspiracy theory.⁶⁴ Seale rallied to support LaRouche’s 1986 ballot initiative in California, Proposition 64, which would have required the testing of all 27 million Californians for HIV, removed HIV-positive individuals from the workplace, and confined them in quarantine.⁶⁵ The ballot initiative was defeated by a margin of two to one.⁶⁶ Still, it was a sign of the panic surrounding the AIDS epidemic at the time that nearly one-third of California’s voters supported such extreme measures in combatting AIDS.⁶⁷ The campaign itself was yet another example of how political extremists can harness and instrumentalize conspiracy theories to win new supporters for their political goals. Implicit in LaRouche’s propagation of the HIV-as-bioweapon thesis was the need to combat homosexuality, which allegedly threatened to weaken the United States in the face of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Streckers’ variant of the HIV-as-bioweapon thesis warned against the dangers of U.S. government bureaucrats, their counterparts at the United Nations (UN), and the dangers of a Communist fifth column. Such mobilizations were hardy perennials of far-right discourse in the United States and the United Kingdom during the Cold War, especially during the Red and Lavender Scares of the late 1940s and 1950s.⁶⁸

had proposed his thesis before Segal’s publications became known in the United States. See William Campbell Douglass, “W.H.O. Murdered Africa,” Monrovia, CA, September 1987, available online at The Bible Believers [website], <http://www.biblebelievers.org.au/who.htm>. On the Streckers’ influence on subsequent conspiracy theorists, see, for example, Horowitz, *Emerging Viruses*, p. 104.

64. Michael Fumento, “The Political Uses of an Epidemic,” *The New Republic*, Vol. 199, No. 6/7 (8 and 15 August 1988), p. 22.

65. “Seale Warns AIDS Could Wipe Out Man,” *EIR*, Vol. 13, No. 41 (17 October 1986), p. 29; and David L. Kirp, “LaRouche Turns to AIDS politics,” *The New York Times*, 11 September 1986, p. 27.

66. Kevin Roderick, “THE STATE ELECTION: LaRouche Trounced on All Fronts but Vows to Keep Trying,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 November 1986, p. 4.

67. LaRouche named the group behind the ballot initiative the “Prevent AIDS Now Initiative Committee” (PANIC).

68. See, for example, David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (New York: Little, Brown, 1998). Recent revelations about extensive Soviet espionage in the United States during the Stalin era and Moscow’s contacts with individuals who were later considered to be victims of McCarthyism have led to a reassessment of the boundaries between conspiracy theory and real conspiracy. See, for example, K. A. Cuordileone, “The

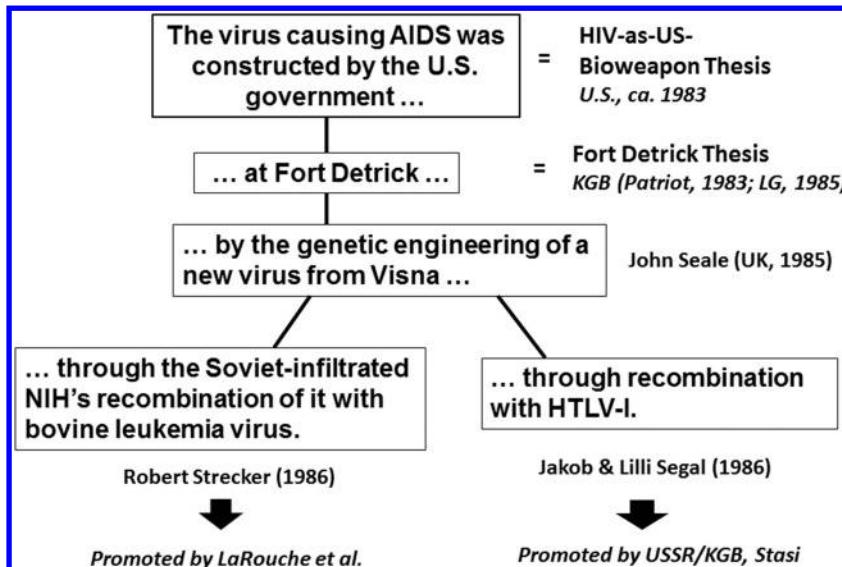


Figure 1: Coevolution of the Two Major Strains of the HIV-as-U.S.-bioweapon Conspiracy Theory, 1983–1985

Thus, by 1986, two major strains of the HIV-as-U.S.-bioweapon conspiracy theory had coevolved: a KGB-preferred version and a version (or versions) preferred by LaRouche and his followers. Figure 1 demonstrates this coevolution. The KGB built on the original, general conspiracy theory that had begun circulating in the gay community in the United States in 1983 that the government had somehow weaponized the virus causing AIDS—that is, the HIV-as-U.S.-bioweapon thesis—by specifying the location at which the biomedical engineering allegedly place: Fort Detrick, Maryland. Influenced by the Soviet claims, Seale suggested that HIV was created by applying the new technology of genetic engineering to the visna virus in sheep. (Seale initially left open, however, where the genetic engineering had taken place; he later suggested that the Soviet Union, not the United States, was the guilty party.)⁶⁹ The Strecker built on the claims of Seale and, indirectly, the KGB but revised the conspiracy theory to turn it against the Soviet Union and an alleged fifth

Torment of Secrecy: Reckoning with Communism and Anti-Communism after Venona,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (September 2019), pp. 615–642, as well as numerous works by John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr.

69. See John Seale, “Origins of the AIDS Viruses, HIV-1 and HIV-2: Fact or Fiction? Discussion Paper,” *JRSM*, Vol. 81 (September 1988), p. 539.

column in the United States; they blamed the allegedly Soviet-infiltrated NIH and WHO. They made their version of the conspiracy theory sound more scientific by naming a second virus that had allegedly been crossed with visna: the bovine leukemia virus. As Figure 1 shows, the KGB came to promote an enhanced, slightly revised, and more detailed version of its original conspiracy theory beginning in 1986. The new version originated with East Berlin scientists Jakob and Lilli Segal. The Segals suggested, as the KGB had before, that the virus had been constructed at Fort Detrick. In keeping with Seale, they argued that the AIDS virus had been genetically engineered from visna, but, in contrast to Strecker, they suggested that visna had been crossed with a third virus, human T-cell lymphotropic virus type 1 (HTLV-1), to construct a potential bioweapon that became HIV.⁷⁰

The Cycle of Misinformation and Disinformation: U.S. Conspiracy Theorists and the KGB

The cycle of misinformation and disinformation regarding HIV as a bioweapon was not limited to the two major strains promoted by LaRouche and the KGB. In May 1986, *LG* published a follow-up article titled “AIDS: More Questions Than Answers,” which cited not only Seale, as Radio Moscow had in December 1985, but also Nathaniel S. Lehrman, a psychiatrist and former clinical director at Brooklyn State Hospital.⁷¹

In November 1985, the New York *Amsterdam News*, an African-American newspaper, had run an article based on an interview with Lehrman. He had allegedly told the newspaper’s reporter that the spread of the AIDS epidemic in various parts of Africa was a result of bacteriological and chemical experiments by the CIA; that similar experiments had been carried out openly on gays, drug addicts, and African Americans in the United States; and that the CIA and CDC, which was responsible for combatting the AIDS epidemic, were part of the conspiracy.⁷² In a letter to the editor of the *Amsterdam News*, Lehrman later denied he had made these specific assertions. He still left open

70. Jakob Segal and Lilli Segal, “AIDS—Its Nature and Origin,” p. 13. The study was printed in the brochure *AIDS: USA Home-Made Evil, NOT out of AFRICA*, 2nd rev. ed. (n.p.: n.pub., 1986). The brochure identifies neither its year nor place of publication, but it does provide the following information: “published on the occasion of the VIII Non-Aligned Summit in Harare (Zimbabwe) in 1986.” A copy of the brochure is in my possession.

71. “SPID: Voprosov bol’she, chem otvetov,” *LG*, 17 May 1986, p. 15.

72. J. Zambla Browne, “Link AIDS to CIA Warfare,” *Amsterdam News* (New York), 30 November 1985, p. 12. On *Amsterdam News* and its reporting on the epidemic in general, see Cathy J. Cohen,

the possibility, however, that the “spread of AIDS in Africa was the result of activities by the U.S. government, including the CIA.” He also still “suspected” that the U.S. government had carried out experiments relating to AIDS on unwitting subjects, and he insinuated that the U.S. government might seek to use the AIDS virus to eliminate unwanted leaders in Africa.⁷³ *LG* quoted selectively from the interview and Lehrman’s ensuing letter in support of Moscow’s Fort Detrick thesis.⁷⁴ Clearly, the KGB and its allied services were closely reading the U.S. press, including the alternative and community press, in search of “confirmation” for their own baseless thesis.⁷⁵

Although the grounds for Moscow’s citation of Lehrman’s views were clear, why had the *Amsterdam News* provided the U.S. psychiatrist with a platform? At the end of 1983, as government statistics began to show that African Americans were disproportionately affected by the disease, the alleged potential role of the U.S. government in the origins of HIV became one of the major themes in the black press’s coverage of the AIDS epidemic.⁷⁶ Until that point, the traditional black press, just like the mainstream news media in the United States, had insinuated that AIDS was a “gay” disease that—with the exception of another marginalized group, intravenous drug users—spread only occasionally to otherwise “innocent” victims, such as hemophiliacs who had received HIV-infected blood or children born to parents with HIV.⁷⁷ Against this backdrop, the publication of conspiracy theories in the black press served for their promoters as means to defend the African-American community against perceived outside attack from the U.S. government and to keep the community from potential identification with homosexuality. For the first years of the epidemic, as the mainstream media associated AIDS with gays, mainstream African-American newspapers generally did not report on the topic at all. The underlying assumption was simple: blacks were not gay; or, to the extent they were, they were either unrepresentative of the African-American community or an embarrassment to it. By the mid-1980s,

The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 196–223.

73. Nathaniel Lehrman, “Some Minor Inaccuracies,” *Amsterdam News*, 28 December 1985, p. 12.

74. “SPID: Voprosov bol’she, chem otvetov.”

75. Boghardt, “Operation INFEKTION,” p. 5; and Alvin A. Snyder, *Warriors of Disinformation: How Charles Wick, the USIA, and Videotape Won the Cold War* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1995), pp. 113f.

76. Cohen, *Boundaries of Blackness*, pp. 197, 202–203. See also Rockell A. Brown, “Ethnic News Media and Marginalization: African-American Newspaper Coverage of the AIDS Crisis,” in Christopher P. Campbell et al., eds., *Race and News: Critical Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 124.

77. Cohen, *Boundaries of Blackness*, pp. 169–176, 197, 201–204.

as the epidemic was increasingly (if incompletely) acknowledged within the African-American community, conspiracy theorizing helped maintain this ideological boundary between the community and homosexuality. It also served to maintain a boundary, at least for some conspiracy theorists, between ostensibly white gays suffering from AIDS and other, “innocent” victims of the disease, who were the only victims within the black community, with the possible exception of intravenous drug users.⁷⁸

Lehrman had avoided any explicit condemnations of gays in his commentaries about alleged U.S. government involvement in the origin of AIDS. But he argued that not only a virus but also chemical toxins could cause AIDS, and he implied that African Americans, in contrast to other high-risk groups such as gays and intravenous drug users, could have developed AIDS from exposure to such toxins.⁷⁹ This could explain at least in part the apparent interest of the *Amsterdam News* in his theories. With regard to the gay community in general, Lehrman had already laid out his views in *New York Jewish Week* in 1984. He had declared “homosexuality” to be “a dangerous political cult, which seeks deliberately, if often surreptitiously, to spread sexual promiscuity.”⁸⁰

Given *LG*’s citation of Lehrman’s alleged views, the question arises whether Lehrman was working for the KGB. The available evidence does not indicate that he was involved with Soviet officials, let alone the KGB. In the days before the publication of the article in *LG*, Major General Vladimir Petrovich Ivanov, the director of the KGB’s Service “A,” responsible for active measures, told his Bulgarian colleagues that the KGB’s AIDS disinformation thesis had “attracted many renowned scientists” and that the KGB was “working on a broad front to expose the USA” as the source of AIDS.⁸¹ The “renowned scientists” in the *LG* article, including Lehrman, were in fact relatively unknown medical doctors, and there is no evidence that the KGB had influenced them directly.

Nevertheless, the KGB may have influenced Lehrman’s views covertly and indirectly. In Lehrman’s subsequent letter to the editor of *Amsterdam News*, in which he challenged the reporting of his earlier statements, he cited as a source for his assertions regarding the CIA the Washington-based *Covert Action*

78. *Ibid.*, pp. 197–199, 341–342. See also, for example, Abiola Sinclair, “Did the CIA Create AIDS?” *Amsterdam News*, 9 November 1985, p. 24.

79. Nathaniel S. Lehrman, “A ‘Natural’ Epidemic?” *Amsterdam News*, 18 January 1986, p. 13.

80. Lehrman, “Homosexuality Seen as ‘Political Cult,’” *New York Jewish Week*, 27 April 1984, p. 26.

81. L. Nikolov, Information Regarding the Meeting Held with the Soviet Comrades during the International Meeting on AM in Hungary (11–17.5.1986), n.d., in COMDOS, F. 9, Op. 4, A.E 669, p. 221.

Information Bulletin (CAIB), established by CIA defector Philip Agee.⁸² Based on the notes of former KGB archivist Vasiliy Mitrokhin, the KGB facilitated the bulletin's establishment; Agee had already long served as Agent "PONT" for the KGB; and the members of *CAIB*'s editorial board, who apparently did not know about the KGB's involvement in their magazine, received the cryptonym "RUPOR." The KGB fed the magazine with secret information, especially the names of alleged CIA agents, but it could not provide enough material for an entire magazine. Therefore, the journalists and disgruntled former CIA employees on the publication's staff sought out publicly available information to discredit the CIA and other U.S. government agencies.⁸³

Although Lehrman unknowingly cited an outlet for KGB disinformation, he became aware that the Soviet Union was citing him—a fact he acknowledged in his own article for *CAIB* in the summer of 1987. In the article, "Is AIDS Non-Infectious? The Possibility and Its CBW [Chemical and Biological Warfare] Implications," he insinuated, just like *LG* before, that AIDS was the planned or unplanned product of U.S. chemical and biological warfare research.⁸⁴ He also cited the pseudoscientific theories of Jakob Segal, who was closely associated at this time with the KGB's AIDS disinformation campaign.⁸⁵ Published in two parts in the summer 1987 and winter 1988 issues of *CAIB* was a long essay by editorial board member Robert Lederer, who presented "alternative theories" for the origin of AIDS, many of which had been associated with Soviet and Cuban propaganda. To Lederer's credit, he did critique each of the theories, including Lehrman's contribution.⁸⁶

82. Lehrman, "Some Minor Inaccuracies."

83. Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield*, pp. 206, 232–233.

84. Nathaniel S. Lehrman, "Is AIDS Non-infectious? The Possibility and Its CBW Implications," *CAIB*, Vol. 28 (Summer 1987), p. 62.

85. *Ibid.*, pp. 61–62.

86. Robert Lederer, "Origin and Spread of AIDS (I): Is the West Responsible?," *CAIB*, Vol. 28 (Summer 1987), pp. 43–54. Among the theories Lederer cites is indirect exposure to dioxin (similar to "Agent Orange" in Vietnam; pp. 47–48) or coinfection with the viruses for maguari and dengue fever, for whose spread in Cuba the United States was allegedly responsible (pp. 49–53). In a follow-up article he cited other speculations about the origins of AIDS, including infection with the African swine fever virus, for whose spread in Cuba the United States had allegedly also been responsible. See Robert Lederer, "Origin and Spread of AIDS (II): Is the West Responsible (Conclusion)?," *CAIB*, Vol. 29 (Winter 1988), pp. 52–55. For the accusation that the United States was responsible for the spread of maguari and dengue fever in Cuba, see Bill Schap, "U.S. Biological Warfare: The 1981 Cuba Dengue Epidemic," *CAIB*, Vol. 17 (Summer 1982), pp. 28–31. Regarding the apparent role of Soviet and Cuban propaganda in at least some of the accusations, see Memorandum from [sanitized], Chief, Foreign Subversion and Instability Center, Office of Global Issues, Directorate of Intelligence, CIA, "Soviet Disinformation: Allegations of US Misdeeds," 28 March 1986, in CIA Freedom of Information Act Reading Room, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP86T01017R000100620001-1.pdf>.

In hinting at a possible U.S. government conspiracy, Lehrman was by no means alone. In October 1987, Shively returned to his conspiracy theorizing in a new article for *Gay Community News*. Once again, he sought to defend his community against perceived outside attack from the CDC, which “would have us believe that AIDS was first spread in this country by homosexual and junkie behaviors.”⁸⁷ In the article, he cited various conspiracy theories regarding the origins and spread of the AIDS virus, including those popular with the Streckers regarding the alleged role of vaccination programs and Lederer’s contributions to *CAIB* regarding alternative explanations for the origins of AIDS and the KGB’s Fort Detrick thesis as presented by Segal.⁸⁸

The cycle of misinformation and disinformation between U.S. conspiracy theorists and the KGB did not begin and end with Lehrman, Shively, or LaRouche and his associates. For example, at the end of October 1988, the KGB’s disinformation specialists in Service “A” told their Bulgarian colleagues: “In the USA there is an Islamic sect that is blaming Jewish-American doctors of intentionally infecting Muslims and especially children with AIDS. This can be exploited with regard to the export of American blood.”⁸⁹ The accusation in question came from Steve Cokely, the “health minister” of Louis Farrakhan’s Nation of Islam and then adviser to Chicago Mayor Eugene Sawyer. For many years thereafter, Farrakhan’s organization continued to spread the allegation that Jewish doctors were intentionally infecting African-American children. “Professor Griff” from the rap group Public Enemy gave further popularity to Farrakhan’s anti-Semitic version of the thesis.⁹⁰

The Green-Monkey Hypothesis, the Segals, and the Harare Brochure

The May 1986 article in *LG* had reported on the speculations of Seale and Lehrman and on a conflict at the international symposium “AIDS in Africa” in Brussels in December 1985. After several Western scientists had presented

87. Charley Shively, “AIDS and Genes (Part I of III): On the Sidewalks of Washington, DC, Someone Painted ‘AIDS/Gay Genocide’: Filling in Some of the Glaring Gaps in Public Information about the Disease Leaves a Frightening and Still Puzzling Picture,” *Gay Community News*, 4 October 1987, p. 3.

88. Ibid.

89. Stankov, “Memorandum Regarding the Conversations Held with Service ‘A’ of the FCD of the KGB in Moscow from 25–30 October 1988 Regarding Cooperation, 28 November 1988,” in COM-DOS, F. 9, Op. 4, A.E. 681, p. 118.

90. Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 243–234.

the thesis of a natural origin of AIDS in Africa, a group of African researchers at the event had published a declaration that none of the papers presented at the conference had provided “concrete evidence” of an African origin of AIDS. The issue of an African origin of AIDS had then been stricken from the symposium’s agenda because, as *LG* reported, the thesis “smacked strongly of racism.”⁹¹ Several African governments had canceled the appearance of their scientists at the gathering or had forbidden their participation altogether. They feared a potential negative impact on tourism if their countries became associated with “AIDS in Africa.” They also rejected the theory of an African origin of AIDS as racist.⁹²

The offending statements by Western scientists at the symposium had been based in part on an “informal hypothesis” that virologist Myron “Max” Essex from the Harvard School of Public Health had presented to the press—namely, that HIV had spread from green monkeys to human beings in Africa.⁹³ From a skewed ideological perspective, the KGB viewed the green-monkey hypothesis not as an attempt by a scientist to explain a complex study in simple terms to the public or as an effort to gain publicity for his work but as an attempt by the U.S. government to counter the Soviet thesis and limit the ensuing damage to its reputation.⁹⁴ Ivanov, for example, had informed his Bulgarian “comrades” in May 1986 that the KGB was “controlling everything being published” on the origins of HIV/AIDS in the USSR and would not

91. The article cited V. P. Sergiev, Director of the Chief Administration for Diseases Requiring Quarantine at the Soviet Ministry of Health, with regard to the conference in Brussels. See “SPID: Voprosov bol’she, chem orvetov,” p. 15. Also see Colin Norman, “Politics and Science Clash on African AIDS,” in Loren K. Clarke and Malcolm Potts, eds., *AIDS Reader*, Vol. 1 (Wellesley, MA: Branden Books, 1988), pp. 288–291.

92. See, for example, Reiner Klingholz, “Tödliches Puzzle am Äquator,” *Die Zeit*, 28 February 1986, p. 41; Harry Nelson, “African Nations Shun AIDS Research Reports,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 December 1985, pt. 4, p. 3; Paul Kocheleff, “AIDS in Burundi and South Africa: A Day-to-Day Experience,” in Phillippe Denis and Charles Becker, eds., *The HIV/AIDS Epidemic in Sub-Saharan Africa in a Historical Perspective* (Lewes, DE: Distant Production House University, October 2006), online ed., p. 146, at http://www.dphu.org/uploads/attachements/books/books_1448_0.pdf; “Africans Resent Blame for AIDS,” *St. Petersburg Times* (Florida), 6 December 1987, p. 1D; and Alfred J. Fortin, “The Politics of AIDS in Kenya,” in Clarke and Potts, eds., *AIDS Reader*, Vol. 1, pp. 292–298.

93. See L. Nikolov, “Information Regarding the Meeting Held with the Soviet Friends during the International Conference on AM in Hungary, 11–17 May 1986,” in COMDOS, F. 9 Op. 4, A.E. 669, p. 221. In a phone conversation with me, Essex said he had presented the press with an “informal hypothesis” that “HIV arose in Africa among sub-human primates.” The press, he noted, “made too much out of the word ‘green.’” Myron Essex, telephone interview, 20 December 2013. Nevertheless, the press cited him directly at the time with regard to the potential origin of HIV in a virus among green monkeys. See, for example, Daniel Q. Haney, Associated Press (AP), “Discovery of Monkey AIDS Virus May Speed Vaccine Development,” 14 April 1985, available online at AP News Archive, <http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1985/Discovery-Of-Monkey-AIDS-Virus-May-Speed-Vaccine-Development/id-d7f5a8979677d791edb3b04db2395c77>.

94. Nikolov, “Information”; and Lehrman, “Is AIDS Non-infectious?”

permit the publication of alternate theories “favorable to the USA (such as that regarding the monkey origins of the disease).”⁹⁵ The reactions of African politicians and scientists before and during the Brussels symposium also made it clear to Moscow that a propaganda offensive against the green-monkey hypothesis and an African origin of HIV would help strengthen Soviet foreign propaganda and influence in Africa.

The KGB thus counted it as a major international breakthrough for its disinformation campaign when a photocopied brochure with the title, *AIDS: USA Home-Made Evil, NOT out of AFRICA* was distributed immediately before and during the summit meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Harare, Zimbabwe in August-September 1986.⁹⁶ The brochure expanded on the KGB’s Fort Detrick thesis and also contained a “scientific study” attacking the “legend of the green monkey.”⁹⁷ The authors of this section of the brochure, Jakob and Lilli Segal, wrote that Essex had spread his “legend” in the mass media as concerns about the development of biological weapons and AIDS were creating a “tense situation” in U.S. public opinion.⁹⁸ The Segals asserted: “His legend was an attempt to misinform the general public, feeling threatened by the spreading of AIDS; the attempt was successful.”⁹⁹ The Segals had indeed discovered an error in Essex’s “informal hypothesis.” Although he and his co-researchers had written only about a close relationship between a retrovirus in green monkeys and HIV, Essex had publicly presented a much more specific conclusion: that the virus in green monkeys was the direct predecessor to HIV and that the monkey virus had become HIV after its communication to human beings.¹⁰⁰ The brochure containing the Segals’ study received a positive welcome from the local press. The Zimbabwean journal *Social Change and Development* printed a positive review and summary of the pamphlet, and the Harare *Sunday Mail* cited the study, written by the “French [sic] scientists” Jakob and Lilli Segal in a front-page article: “Allegations that AIDS has its roots in Africa are a gigantic and racist deception

95. Nikolov, “Information.” In this case, Ivanov overstated or overestimated the KGB’s power. Soviet scientists did publish articles and make statements that contradicted Segal. See U.S. Department of State, *Soviet Influence Activities, 1986–87*, p. 37.

96. *AIDS: USA Home-Made Evil*.

97. Segal and Segal, “AIDS—Its Nature and Origin,” pp. 18–21.

98. *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

99. *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

100. P. J. Kanki, J. Alroy, and M. Essex, “Isolation of T-lymphotropic Retrovirus Related to HTLV-III/LAV from Wild-Caught African Green Monkeys,” *Science*, Vol. 230 (1985), pp. 951–954; Essex, telephone interview; and Haney, “Discovery of Monkey AIDS.”

operation the United States is running to divert attention from real facts.”¹⁰¹ They represented an attempt “to sweep the latest filth of the white man before the black man’s door.”¹⁰²

Who were Jakob and Lilli Segal? Although both Segals were often identified as “French scientists,” as in Harare’s *Sunday Mail*, they were in fact Soviet citizens living in Communist East Berlin. However, both Segals did have a connection to France: as members of the German Communist Party and as Jews, they had fled Nazi Germany in 1934 to France, where they attained French citizenship and later fought in the anti-Nazi Resistance. During the war, both had received Soviet citizenship via Moscow’s embassy in France based on Jakob Segal’s birth in Soviet-annexed Lithuania. On the orders of the same embassy, they had emigrated to the GDR in 1953, where Jakob Segal established the Department of Biology at Humboldt University in Berlin. In the 1950s, both had willingly provided information to the Stasi, although only Jakob was designated a “contact person,” and for a short period the KGB took over the contact with the Segals. From 1959 to 1962, Jakob was returned to the Stasi, which registered him as an unofficial collaborator. The Stasi broke off contact in 1962 because Jakob, although still a loyal and convinced Communist, had proven too independent and had refused to follow the Stasi’s orders. The Segals taught in Cuba after the revolution there before returning to the German Democratic Republic (GDR).¹⁰³

Nevertheless, despite these earlier experiences with the KGB and Stasi, it is unclear what connection, if any, the Segals had to either secret service at the time the KGB initiated its AIDS disinformation campaign in 1985. The evidence currently available suggests that Segal began his research on his own in the summer of 1985, although he may have been prompted directly or covertly by the KGB.¹⁰⁴ His work was influenced at least indirectly by the KGB through the articles in *Patriot* (1983) and *LG* (1985) espousing the Fort Detrick thesis.¹⁰⁵

101. “Book Review: ‘AIDS—USA—Home Made Evil, Not Imported from Africa,’” *Social Change and Development*, Vol. 14 (1986), pp. 34–37; and “US Germ Warfare Blunder Started Aids, Say Scientists,” *Sunday Mail* (Harare), 24 August 1986, p. 1.

102. Ibid.

103. For a more complete biography of the Segals, see Geissler and Sprinkle, “Disinformation Squared,” pp. 13–14.

104. Ibid., p. 2; and Selvage and Nehring, “AIDS-Verschwörung,” p. 51.

105. Jakob Segal to West German Geneticist Benno Müller-Hill, 2 December 1985, in Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (ABBAW), Nachlass (NL) Benno Müller-Hill, Nr. 66.

Was the Stasi somehow involved with the Segals or their research at this point, as Bohnsack later suggested?¹⁰⁶ The KGB asserted to its Bulgarian “comrades” that the Stasi had become involved in the disinformation campaign in 1985.¹⁰⁷ Because of the wholesale destruction of the HVA’s records, it cannot be ascertained exactly how and when in 1985 the HVA became involved in the campaign. According to the registers for incoming messages from the KGB and the HVA’s database for incoming and outgoing information, the KGB forwarded its first and only missive regarding AIDS for the year 1985 to the MfS in the first half of June 1985.¹⁰⁸ Apparently, the MfS, in contrast to the Bulgarians, did not receive a message about the AIDS disinformation campaign in October 1985. The Stasi may have been informed about the disinformation campaign in the KGB’s dispatch from June, and, at the very latest, the Stasi’s division for foreign disinformation and active measures, HVA/X, would have learned about the KGB’s disinformation campaign in mid-October 1985, when its leaders met with representatives of the KGB’s Service “A” in Berlin.¹⁰⁹ By this point, the KGB had informed the Bulgarian “comrades” about the AIDS disinformation campaign and requested their assistance and had also contacted Czechoslovak foreign intelligence, which had ordered its stations in Washington and New York to devise relevant active measures.¹¹⁰

At the very latest, HVA/X was activated for the AIDS disinformation campaign in November 1985, when KGB liaison officer Lyamin secured the assistance of the Stasi’s division for domestic propaganda in gathering reactions in the Western press to Zapevalov’s article and Moscow’s Fort Detrick

106. German journalist Klaus Behling cited Bohnsack to this effect, and Boghardt later cited Behling. See Klaus Behling, *Kundschafter a. D.: Das Ende der DDR-Spionage* (Stuttgart: Hohenheim Verlag, 2003), pp. 252–254; and Boghardt, “Operation INFektION,” p. 9. Bohnsack did not make this claim in his earlier, generally more accurate memoirs; there he asserted only that the HVA had followed KGB orders in initiating its role in the disinformation campaign and that Segal and others had later picked up on the thesis favored by the HVA. He and his coauthor, Herbert Brehmer, concluded: “Who among the participants [in spreading the AIDS disinformation] knowingly contributed to spreading the dirty story and who allowed themselves to be misled and misused remains an open question.” Bohnsack und Brehmer, *Auftrag*, pp. 219–220. Regarding the relative accuracy of the Bohnsack-Bremer book, at least as far as memoirs go, see, Christopher Nehring, “Eine etwas andere Rezension: Die Erinnerungen zweier Stasi-Offiziere im Lichte neuer Archivalien,” *Journal for Intelligence, Propaganda and Security Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2017), pp. 170–171.

107. Information No. 2742, n.d., in COMDOS, F. 9, Op. 4, A.E. 675, p. 157.

108. For the incoming KGB information regarding AIDS, 7 June 1985, see BStU, MfS, SdM 557, Entry 508, p. 86. The HVA apparently received the same information on 14 June. See BStU, MfS, HV A/MD/6, SIRA-TDB 12, SE8531191.

109. Memorandum from the Director of HVA/X, Wagenbreth, to the Director of Division X of the MfS, Damm, 30 July 1985, in BStU, MfS, Abt. X, Nr. 312, p. 185.

110. Message for the Residencies in New York and Washington, 21 October 1985.

thesis.¹¹¹ Given that the KGB “Center” in Moscow had ordered its station in Karlshorst to have Lyamin track Western reactions to AIDS disinformation, he likely would have informed not only the Stasi’s domestic propaganda division but also HVA/X, with whom he mainly coordinated, about his requirements. By the end of the year, the Stasi, prompted by Lyamin, was also seeking East German scientists who might come out in support of Moscow’s Fort Detrick thesis.¹¹²

Wolfgang Mutz, the deputy director of HVA/X, later suggested to his colleagues in Bulgaria’s Durzhavna Sigurnost (State Security) organs that the HVA had taken steps to “attract” GDR scientists to the AIDS disinformation campaign and that one of them—clearly, Jakob Segal—had “prepared a study that proves that AIDS was the by-product of a biological weapon of the USA.”¹¹³ Mutz also credited the “operational division” of the HVA, with which HVA/X had been cooperating, for successfully obtaining “a great work with scientific value”—that is, Segal’s study—for the AIDS disinformation campaign.¹¹⁴

The operational division of the HVA to which Lyamin and the HVA/X turned when seeking open-source intelligence, such as newspaper accounts regarding the origins of AIDS or, for that matter, information about East German scientists working in the fields of AIDS, biotechnology, and genetic engineering, was the office responsible for foreign intelligence in the latter three fields—namely, Department (*Referat*) 5 in Division XIII of the HVA’s Sector for Science and Technology (*Sektor Wissenschaft und Technik*, SWT), abbreviated HVA/SWT/XIII/5.¹¹⁵ At the beginning of September 1985, its officer Dieter van de Sand registered a “security dossier” (*Sicherungsvorgang*, SVG), “Wind,” apparently regarding the protection of East German scientists in the areas of AIDS research, genetic engineering, and biotechnology from outside “attacks” in the form of espionage or manipulation by foreign

111. Handwritten Notes, 12 November 1985; Handwritten Notes, 29 November 1985; and Telegram 1666/85, n.d.

112. See Handwritten Note, from an officer of ZAIG/6 regarding a meeting with “Vitalii” [i.e., Lyamin] on 30 December 1985, in BStU, MfS, ZAIG, Nr. 14413, p. 46.

113. L. Nikolov, Director of Department in Division 8 of the KGB’s First Chief Directorate, Information regarding the Working Consultations Held with the German Comrades from 16 to 19 September in Sofia, 7 October 1986, in COMDOS, F. 9, Op. 4, A.E. 670, p. 104.

114. Lieutenant D. Stankov, Information (Short Report) regarding the Talks with Comrade Wolfgang Mutz, Deputy Head of the Division for AM in the Hauptverwaltung Aufklärung of the MfS of the GDR during His Visit to Bulgaria from 16–19.9.1986, 22 November 1986, in COMDOS, F. 9, Op. 4, A.E. 670, pp. 123–124.

115. Müller-Enbergs, “Hauptverwaltung A,” p. 212.

agents.¹¹⁶ At some point between the registration of “Wind” in September 1985 and May 1986, when van de Sand ordered the monitoring of the Segals’ mail, both Segals were added to the dossier and thus to van de Sand’s security responsibilities.¹¹⁷ Thus, the “operational division” of the HVA, which Mutz later associated with Segal’s study; the office in the HVA that gathered relevant intelligence about AIDS, genetic engineering, and biotechnology that could be used in the AIDS disinformation campaign; and the office responsible for “securing” the Segals on behalf of the Stasi were one and the same: HVA/SWT/XIII/5.

Beyond the registration of the Segals under “Wind,” another likely indicator of the interest of HVA/SWT—or, alternatively, the KGB—in the Segals in connection with the AIDS disinformation campaign is Jakob Segal’s early knowledge of Lehrman’s publications in New York. On 19 March 1986 (i.e., before *LG* published its May 1986 article referring to the publications), Segal had written to a colleague about Lehrman’s findings and their publication in an “obscure club newspaper”—apparently Segal’s (incorrect) understanding of *Amsterdam News*.¹¹⁸ This occurred about one month after Lehrman had published a press release including copies of the articles from *Amsterdam News* and his letters to the editor. He added typewritten comments regarding the publications and hinted at alleged attempts at intervention in the same by the CIA.¹¹⁹ Segal cited the alleged accusations by Lehrman regarding repression

116. SVG “Wind” was officially registered by van de Sand on 6 September 1985. See BStU, AR 2, RoHo F22, Reg.-Nr. XV 3824/85. Also see BStU, MfS, HV A/MD/6, SIRA-TDB 21, ZV8200503. On security dossiers (*Sicherungsvorgänge*) and their meaning, see Roland Lucht, *Das Archiv der Stasi: Begriffe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), p. 204.

117. See Jakob and Lilli Segal, in BStU, AR 2, M/01-Bln-Ost. This disproves Geissler’s assertion that Jakob Segal, given his status as “Soviet citizen and decommissioned IM [unofficial collaborator],” would not have been subject to Stasi spying on his mail or telephone calls in the 1980s. See Geißler, “Es gab keine AIDS-Verschwörung,” p. 102. Regarding the registration of Jakob and Lilli Segal in SVG Wind, see Selvage and Nehring, “AIDS-Verschwörung,” pp. 61–68. Geissler and Sprinkle claim, in “Disinformation Squared,” p. 34, without evidence, “This registration [of the Segals with HVA/SWT] was of long standing and could not have related to AIDS.” Even after the publication of additional details, Geissler held to his unfounded claim of a “long-standing” registration (since the 1960s or 1970s) of the Segals by HVA/SWT. See Geißler, “Es gab keine AIDS-Verschwörung,” p. 97. In fact, the Segals were registered under SVG “Wind,” which van de Sand had officially established only on 6 September 1985. Van de Sand himself had begun his work as a regular employee of HVA/SWT/XIII/5 only on 1 January 1985. From March 1983 until that point, he had worked as a paid, full-time, unofficial collaborator (*hauptamtlich inoffizieller Mitarbeiter*, HIM) for HVA/SWT/XIII under the codename “Behrend.” See “van de Sand, Dieter,” in BStU, AR 2, HA KuSch/AKG-KA-HM. He is registered under his birth name, Dieter Bahr, in RoHo, F16 and F22, Reg.-Nr. XV/6331/81.

118. J. Segal to Benno Müller-Hill, 19 March 1986, in ABBAW, NL Müller-Hill, Nr. 67.

119. Nathaniel S. Lehrman, Clinical Director, Retired, Brooklyn State Hospital, “Media Cover-Up of AIDS?” February 1986, in BStU, MfS, HA II, Nr. 22082, pp. 41–45.

by the CIA in his March letter.¹²⁰ How did Segal, living in Communist East Berlin, learn so quickly about Lehrman's articles in the “obscure” *Amsterdam News* in New York?

At some point HVA/SWT obtained Lehrman's press release, a copy of which can still be found in the Stasi files, but whether this was before or after Segal's letter is unclear.¹²¹ Even though one cannot rule out that HVA/SWT received its information about Lehrman from Jakob or Lilli Segal, the question of how Jakob Segal heard of Lehrman would need to be explained. A more likely possibility is that Segal learned about Lehrman from HVA/SWT. This is far more plausible than the other way around, given HVA/SWT's access to foreign intelligence, including open-source intelligence from the HVA's station in New York. Another plausible scenario is that Segal and HVA/SWT learned about Lehrman's activities from a common source—possibly the KGB, which was monitoring the U.S. press closely for materials related to the HIV-as-US-bioweapon thesis.

Whatever role the KGB or HVA might or might not have played in the Segals' research, Jakob Segal began in mid-March 1986 to send his study to editors and academics abroad for potential publication in scientific journals and also in newspapers and popular magazines—that is, for propaganda purposes.¹²² With regard to his activities, Segal claimed privately to have the backing of the international secretary of East Germany's ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED), Hermann Axen.¹²³ Segal may have been exaggerating or lying when it came to Axen—perhaps he had simply informed the latter about his

120. Segal to Müller-Hill, 19 March 1986.

121. The press release was attached to Report on Being Contacted by Employees of the U.S. Embassy in the GDR, n.d., in BStU, MfS, HA II, Nr. 22082, pp. 39–40. As Geissler and Sprinkle note, the report, clearly based on statements by Lilli Segal, had been forwarded by Hans-Jürgen Oldenburg of the foreign counterintelligence division (IX) of the HVA to an officer in the Stasi's HA II responsible for domestic counterintelligence. See Geissler and Sprinkle, “Disinformation Squared,” p. 47. What they did not know is that this report about the U.S. diplomats, as well as a second report regarding the Segals' contacts with U.S. diplomats, had originated in HVA/SWT/XIII/5, which had forwarded both reports via HVA/IX to HA II on 16–17 October 1986. HVA/SWT/XIII/5 had attributed the reports to its contact person “Diagnosis,” their codename for one or both of the Segals. The origin of the reports, and thus the press release, in HVA/SWT/XIII/5 is evident from the HVA's database of incoming and outgoing information. See BStU, MfS, HV A/MD/5, SIRA-TDB 14, SE8607428 and SE8607429.

122. See, for example, Jakob Segal to a Japanese professor at the University of Hiroshima, 3 December 1986, in Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv (SAPMO-BA), NY 4516 (Nachlass Jakob und Lilli Segal), Karton (K.) 12, Japan; and Jakob Segal to Volkmar Sigusch, Director of the Institute for Sex Research at the Goethe University in Frankfurt, 12 March 1986, in SAPMO-BA, NY 4516, K. 13. Regarding Segal's acknowledgment that his study would also serve propaganda purposes, see Nagel, HA VII/7, Bericht über durchgeführten Kurztreff mit IMS “Nils,” 6 May 1986, in BStU, MfS, AIM 4835/88, Bd. I, p. 73.

123. Selvage and Nehring, “AIDS-Verschwörung,” pp. 48–49.

own planned research—but Axen did oversee the party’s foreign propaganda, including campaigns in which the Stasi’s active measures played a role.¹²⁴ He certainly had the authority to give Segal the green light for publishing abroad and may have even commissioned Segal’s study for use in foreign propaganda at Soviet request.¹²⁵

Whether Segal decided on his own to begin his research in the summer of 1985 (as he claimed) or was prompted by the KGB, the Stasi, or someone else, HVA/SWT became aware of Segal’s research at the very latest in the spring of 1986.¹²⁶ On 7 May 1986, the HVA/SWT’s van de Sand, the Stasi officer associated with “securing” the Segals, ordered the surveillance of their mail.¹²⁷ Perhaps the HVA—and Moscow—wanted to know about Segal’s contacts for potential use in their disinformation campaign; at the very least, HVA/SWT wanted to prevent the Segals from being approached by Western agents who might seek to contact them.¹²⁸

The month of July 1986 marked a turning point for the HVA with regard to both the Segals and the KGB’s AIDS disinformation campaign. By this point HVA/SWT had been in touch with Segal to provide him with at least one piece of advice regarding his study.¹²⁹ Whether he took the advice or ignored it remains unclear, but by this time he would have learned—if he did not know long before—about HVA’s interest in his research. In the same month, HVA/SWT received its first piece of intelligence information from a contact person, “Diagnosis”—the apparent codename for one or both of the Segals.¹³⁰ The nominal coauthor of the Segals’ study, Ronald Dehmlow (IM “Nils”), also received his first secret assignment from HVA/SWT at the beginning of July 1986 regarding the Segals and their research.¹³¹ At the end

124. Ibid., p. 16. The Segals knew Axen personally through his daughter, who had taken classes from Segal at Humboldt University. See Geißler, “Es gab keine AIDS-Verschwörung,” pp. 101–102.

125. Selvage and Nehring, “AIDS-Verschwörung,” pp. 48–54.

126. See Jakob Segal to an East German geneticist, 17 July 1987, in SAPMO-BA, NY 4516, vorl. K. 12, AIDS+Nazi-Verbrechen.

127. See “Segal, Jakob, and Segal, Lilli,” n.d., in BStU, AR 2, M/01-Bln-Ost.

128. The latter was the sense of SVG “Wind.”

129. Theisinger, HA VII/7, “Information zur Person Prof. Dr. Segal, Jakob, erfaßt HVA/SWT/13, Gen. Tiedemann [sic, Thielemann],” 31 July 1986, in BStU, MfS, AIM 4835/88, Bd. I, pp. 113–114.

130. See BStU, MfS, HV A/MD/2, SIRA-TDB 11, SE8607838. Regarding the registration of one or both Segals under the codename “Diagnose” (Diagnosis), see Selvage and Nehring, “AIDS-Verschwörung,” pp. 61–68.

131. BStU, MfS, AIM 4835/88; and Theisinger, HA VII/7, Treffbericht: IMS “Nils,” 7 February 1986, in BStU, MfS, AIM 4835/88, Bd. I, pp. 97–98. Dehmlow denied he had ever worked as an unofficial collaborator for the Stasi. See Ronald Dehmlow, interview, in Berlin, 31 October 2013.

of July 1986, Dehmlow's control officer noted that the Segals were preparing their AIDS study not only for Axen, as Jakob Segal was claiming privately, but also for HVA/SWT.¹³² Although the Stasi officer had likely learned of Axen's alleged role from Dehmlow (and thus indirectly from Segal), the information regarding HVA/SWT's role could have come only from within the Stasi itself.¹³³

If Jakob Segal had been asked in July 1986, he might have disputed HVA/SWT's claim that he was preparing his AIDS study for the MfS as well as for Axen. After 1989, Segal denied publicly and privately that the Stasi had played any role in his publications.¹³⁴ Still, the fact that HVA/SWT—"the security," as Segal called them—had given him advice would have undoubtedly prompted him to ask, if he did not already know, why the MfS was interested in his research.¹³⁵ He would have learned from HVA/SWT—or, given his earlier dealings with the KGB and Stasi, been able to guess—that they were interested in using his AIDS study for their own ends.

132. Theisinger, "Information zur Person Prof. Dr. Segal," 31 July 1986. Theisinger also noted that Segal was "registered positively [*positiv erfasst*]" by HVA/SWT/XIII/5. This formulation was used by the MfS to designate someone who was working on its behalf. See Selvage and Nehring, "AIDS-Verschwörung," p. 55, esp. n. 205. My thanks to Georg Herbsttritt for his information and advice regarding this terminology.

133. Geißler, "Es gab keine AIDS-Verschwörung," p. 101. Under the principles of secrecy usually followed by the MfS, unofficial collaborators were not normally informed of the exact unit or office of the MfS for which they were working. At best, they were perhaps informed that they were working for foreign intelligence (HVA), military intelligence, or for internal security. Theisinger's predecessor as Dehmlow's control officer, Major Nagel, had submitted a search inquiry (*Suchauftrag*) regarding Jakob Segal on the official MfS Form F10 on 29 May 1986 to the central registry of the MfS (Division XII). See Nagel, HA VII/7, Bericht über durchgeführten Treff mit IMS "Nils," 29 May 1986, in BStU, MfS, AIM 4835/88, Bd. I, pp. 74–75. This was the normal procedure when a unit of the MfS became interested in a person, either for potential repression or—as in this case—for potential recruitment. Division XII would check whether another unit of the MfS had already registered the person for another reason. If the person was already registered, as was the case with Jakob Segal, both the inquiring division (i.e., Nagel) and the division that had registered him (i.e., HVA/SWT/XIII/5) would have been informed about their common interest in the person. See the entry for "Suchauftrag" in Lucht, ed., *Das Archiv der Stasi*, p. 221, as well as the relevant internal regulation of the MfS: "Dienstanweisung Nr. 2/81 zur einheitlichen Gestaltung der Erfassung und Überprüfung von Personen und Objekten, der Registrierung von Vorgängen und Akten sowie der Archivierung politisch-operativen Schriftgutes in den Abteilungen XII," 1 July 1981, Sections 2 and 2.1, in BStU, MfS, BdL-Dok. Nr. 4210, pp. 1–24. Thus, the officers of HVA/SWT/XIII/5 would have learned of Nagel's interest in Segal, and—as was clearly the case—they then spoke with Nagel (or later Theisinger) about their mutual interest. In this way, HVA/SWT/XIII/5 learned about Dehmlow and used the opportunity to give him assignments related to Segal through his control officer.

134. Jakob Segal, *Öffentliche Erklärung*, 30 January 1992, in BArch, NY 4516, vorl. K. 7, n.p.

135. Theisinger, "Information zur Person Prof. Dr. Segal," 31 July 1986.

Operation “Denver”: The Stasi and the Harare Brochure

Given the intensification of HVA/SWT interest in the Segals and their AIDS study in July 1986, it is not surprising that in the same month HVA/X officially registered an Operation “Denver”—not Operation “INFEKTION” as Bohnsack claimed in the 2000s—in the HVA’s files.¹³⁶ In a memorandum to Bulgarian DS officials dated 3 September 1986, HVA/X defined “Denver” as follows:

With the goal of exposing the dangers to mankind arising from the research, production, and use of biological weapons, and also in order to strengthen anti-American sentiments in the world and to spark domestic political controversies in the USA, the GDR side will present you with a scientific study and other materials that prove that AIDS originated in the USA, not in Africa, and that AIDS is a product of the USA’s bioweapons research.¹³⁷

Given the registration of Operation “Denver” in July 1986, Wolf’s claim that the KGB first requested HVA/X’s assistance in the disinformation campaign in the fall of 1986 rings untrue.¹³⁸

The comments of Deputy Director Mutz of HVA/X regarding “Denver” in a meeting with his Bulgarian “comrades” in mid-September 1986 also suggest earlier involvement by the HVA in the KGB’s efforts. A representative of the Bulgarian active-measures division summarized Mutz’s comments:

The German comrades informed us that for the realization of this active measure, scientists from the GDR were attracted to the topic, and one of them has prepared a study that proves that AIDS was the by-product of a biological weapon of the USA. The study has been and is being used by them in various alternative media around the world.¹³⁹

136. OVO “Denver,” Reg.-Nr. XV 3429/86. The question of the true codename for the AIDS disinformation campaign may seem trivial, but the name “Infektion” has become indelibly associated with it and even dominates the Internet as a meme. A Google search on 27 January 2019 for “Operation Infektion” and “AIDS” yielded 21,200 results. The name has also served as a title and extended metaphor—that is, disinformation spreads like a viral infection—for a recent, popular documentary film debunking Soviet and Russian disinformation. For those seeking to combat contemporary disinformation, close attention to facts, even such trivial ones, is important. See Ellick, Westbrook, and Kessel, “OPERATION INFEKTION.”

137. Plan der gemeinsamen und abgestimmten aktiven Maßnahmen der Aufklärungsorgane des MdI der VR Bulgarien und des MfS der DDR für 1987 und 1988, Berlin, 3 September 1986, in COM-DOS, F. 9, Op. 4, A.E. 670, p. 112.

138. Wolf, “L’arte della simulazione,” p. 12.

139. Nikolov, Information, 7 October 1986, p. 104.

From the context, HVA/X was clearly referring to “AIDS: Its Nature and Origin” by Jakob and Lilli Segal, which had been photocopied and distributed with *AIDS: USA Home-Made Evil, NOT out of AFRICA* during the NAM summit in Harare.¹⁴⁰ The Segals’ study, HVA/X claimed to the Bulgarians, was its “active measure.”¹⁴¹ Thus, it was not a mere coincidence, as Wolf suggested in 1998, that the HVA obtained a copy of the Segals’ study around the same time that the KGB asked HVA/X to help spread the Fort Detrick thesis internationally.¹⁴²

What exactly did it mean for Mutz to declare the Segals’ published—actually, photocopied—study to be its active measure?

What it certainly did not mean—contrary to what Geissler and Sprinkle have implied—was that HVA/X was claiming control over Segal and his research, let alone authorship of Segal’s study.¹⁴³ The officers of HVA/X never made such a claim regarding Segal or his research in their annual meetings with their Bulgarian “comrades” in the years 1986–1989. Indeed, HVA/X generally did not draft larger publications itself, as opposed to forged letters or the occasional newspaper article to be placed in publications outside the Soviet bloc.¹⁴⁴ In many cases, HVA/X would request that an author draft a

140. Segal and Segal, “AIDS—Its Nature and Origin.”

141. Stankov, Information (Short Report), 22 November 1986, COMDOS, pp. 123–124; and Stankov, Work Plan for 1987 for the Direction USA and NATO for Division 8 of the First Chief Directorate, 6 January 1987, in COMDOS, F. 9, Op. 4, A.E. 673, pp. 20–21.

142. For this particular claim by Wolf, see the (more?) complete Italian version of his speech: “Io, magnifico bugiardo,” p. 57. He apparently decided that his mention of the Segals’ study in the context of the KGB’s active-measures campaign regarding AIDS and the HVA’s assistance to the same should remain concealed from the German public. Any mention of the Segals or their study was excised from the published German version of his speech. See Wolf, “L’arte della simulazione,” p. 12. Wolf left open whether the Segals had prepared their study for the KGB. He stated in this regard, “Also for me, the question remained and remains open of who knowingly deceived or let themselves be deceived here.” Wolf, “L’arte della simulazione,” p. 12; and Wolf, “Io, magnifico bugiardo,” p. 57.

143. Geissler and Sprinkle write in “Disinformation Squared,” p. 141: “Judging from these Bulgarian files, [Mutz] left four impressions: that Segal was a fully compliant Stasi asset, that the Harare venture had been a Stasi initiative, [and] that the myth [Fort Detrick thesis] was under his own department’s control. . . . Drawing on our German sources, we suspect this colonel was boasting abroad.” These claims are disingenuous. At no point during the conversation did Mutz claim that “Segal was a fully compliant Stasi asset.” The East German scientists, Mutz said, had been “attracted to” or drawn into research on the origins of AIDS; this suggested something other than domination on the part of the MfS and compliance on the part of Segal. Mutz never suggested everything was “under his own department’s control”; he suggested to the contrary that the responsible “operational division”—that is, HVA/SWT/XIII/5—had also played an unspecified role in the manuscript’s completion and that it was not HVA/X but an East German scientist (i.e., Segal) who had prepared the study that allegedly “proved that AIDS was the by-product of a biological weapon of the USA.” See Stankov, Information (Short Report), 22 November 1986, pp. 123–124.

144. I make this assertion based on my reading not only of the transcripts I cite from meetings between officers of HVA/X and their Bulgarian comrades, but also of transcripts from the meetings between

manuscript based on the organization’s requirements for a given active measure.¹⁴⁵ The author might be an unofficial collaborator of the HVA or the MfS in general—not necessarily HVA/X—and thus someone who knew that the Stasi stood behind the request. Alternatively, the author might have been a contact in the GDR who might or might not have known he or she was dealing with the Stasi; a contact in the West who did not know—at least officially—about the involvement of the Stasi; or a selected expert from East Germany who had simply agreed to draft the manuscript on a one-time (or case-by-case) basis.¹⁴⁶ For other active measures, HVA/X simply made use of existing manuscripts or studies about which it had learned and over which the MfS apparently had had no influence but whose arguments seemed to support HVA/X’s desired disinformation or propaganda thesis.¹⁴⁷ That is, given the shared understanding of the term “active measures” between the East German and Bulgarian intelligence officers, HVA/X was not exaggerating or lying when it proclaimed a published version of the Segal study—for example, the Harare brochure—to be the HVA’s active measure, even if the Segals had drafted the study contained in the brochure on their own with no, or little, help or urging from the HVA (or, in this case, HVA/SWT).

That HVA/X proclaimed the finished Segal study to be its “active measure” was more likely to suggest that the HVA had played or was playing a role in its publication and distribution. In the case of other manuscripts that HVA/X dubbed to be “its” active measures, it had obtained, or sought to obtain, the manuscript’s publication outside the Soviet bloc under the actual author’s name, anonymously, or under the name of a selected contact person or unofficial collaborator living outside the Soviet bloc.¹⁴⁸ Especially trusted agents outside the Soviet bloc who regularly provided such assistance were dubbed “channels” by the Soviet-bloc intelligence services. The various

HVA/X and the active-measures division of Czechoslovak State Security (Division 36 of the First Chief Directorate of the Czechoslovak Federal Ministry of the Interior) from 1966–1986. For the latter, see ABS, a. č. 81282/103, 81282/107, 81282/111, and 81282/117.

145. For example, the rector of the East German Academy for Government and Law in Potsdam-Babelsberg prepared in 1975 a study at the apparent request of the MfS regarding the illegality of the U.S. broadcast stations Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) in international law. An apparent contact person of HVA/X, Emil Hofmann, published excerpts from the article in Western publications. HVA/X deigned the ensuing publications in Austria and West Germany to be part of its active measure “Spider” against RFE/RL. See Selvage, “SA-CIA-HVA,” pp. 131–132.

146. Ibid., pp. 131–134; and ABS, a. č. 81282/103, 107, 111 and 117.

147. See Selvage and Nehring, “AIDS-Verschwörung,” pp. 114–115. See also ABS, a. č. 81282/103, 81282/107, 81282/111, and 81282/117.

148. This was allegedly the case with the book *The Devil and His Dart* about the CIA’s activities in the developing world. Selvage and Nehring, “AIDS-Verschwörung,” p. 73.

East-bloc countries' disinformation divisions assisted one another in finding appropriate "channels" for manuscripts associated with their active measures, depending on the desired language(s) and place(s) of publication for a given work. Some "channels" also assumed responsibility for the translation of a given publication into the target language.¹⁴⁹ In other cases, the original or designated author of the given study, whatever his or her relationship to the HVA might have been, took the initiative in arranging publication outside the Soviet bloc, with the HVA or the "fraternal organs" assisting, if at all, only covertly.¹⁵⁰

Did HVA/X—or the HVA more broadly, as was often the case—play a role in the publication and distribution of the Segals' study as part of the Harare brochure?

The destruction of the most relevant HVA records—the most important being the files regarding Operation "Denver"—means that the most important and substantive documentation of the potential involvement of HVA/X in the publication and distribution of the Harare brochure, at least until the general opening of the former KGB archives, has been destroyed. Nevertheless, there is no reason to disbelieve *a priori* Mutz's claims to the Bulgarians based on the irrelevance or absence of "German sources" in the Stasi archives.¹⁵¹ Mutz had no reason to lie to his Bulgarian "comrades" about the HVA's unspecified role in the publication and distribution of the Harare brochure. The goal of such bilateral discussions between the divisions for active measures of the East European security services was to secure technical support for the further popularization of each side's active measures. This was especially the case for disinformation campaigns led by the KGB, which expected a substantive effort from the other Soviet-bloc services.¹⁵² The KGB had already made clear to the Bulgarians its expectations regarding the AIDS disinformation campaign.¹⁵³ False information about technical aspects of an active measure could create difficulties in obtaining effective assistance from the other security services in the future. Moreover, in other bilateral meetings regarding active measures, HVA/X had openly stated or implied that an author of a

149. Regarding "channels," see Nehring, "Die Zusammenarbeit der DDR-Auslandsaufklärung," pp. 157, 387. See also the records of various discussions between HVA/X and their counterparts in Prague, in ABS, a. č. 81282/103, 81282/107, 81282/111, and 81282/117.

150. For a relevant example, see Selvage, "SA-CIA-HVA," p. 133.

151. Geissler and Sprinkle, "Disinformation Squared," p. 141

152. Nehring, "Die Zusammenarbeit der DDR-Auslandsaufklärung," pp. 154–266; and Selvage, "Operation Synonym," pp. 81–96.

153. KGB, Information Nr. 2955, 7 September 1985.

given manuscript had secured publication on his or her own, without assistance from the HVA.¹⁵⁴ Why Mutz would suddenly have lied in the case of Segal’s study’s appearance in the Harare brochure is unclear.

Geissler has made much of the fact that Mutz did not bring a copy of Segal’s study or the Harare brochure with him to the meeting in Sofia in September 1986. Instead, Mutz promised to send the Bulgarians a copy after his return to East Berlin. Geissler writes, “One must conclude from this that no one in Division 10 [HVA/X] yet had a copy of Segal’s manuscript, neither from the Segals themselves nor from another division of the MfS.”¹⁵⁵ Once again, absence of evidence allegedly serves as evidence of absence.

Although the divisions for active measures exchanged manuscripts and publications, along with supporting information, associated with their larger disinformation campaigns at such bilateral meetings, they also frequently promised to send a given publication—including ones that had already been distributed or were even publicly available—to their Soviet-bloc partner only in the weeks or months following the meeting.¹⁵⁶ Why this was the case remains unclear. Perhaps the disinformation specialists wanted to gauge whether the other side was interested before providing it with a given publication; perhaps the division had encountered logistical problems in obtaining the desired number of copies; or perhaps there was an exaggerated sense of secrecy regarding such publications based on the need-to-know principle. Whatever the reason may be, the frequent delays by the disinformation divisions in exchanging such publications suggest that Geissler’s conclusion that HVA/X did not yet possess a copy of the publication, based on its failure to provide a copy to the Bulgarian “comrades” in September 1986, is without merit.

Moreover, newly released evidence from the Bulgarian archives confirms that HVA/X fulfilled its promise to its colleagues in Sofia. By the beginning of January 1987 at the latest, Bulgarian foreign intelligence had received a copy of the Harare brochure from HVA/X for use in its own active measures in support of the KGB’s AIDS disinformation campaign—Bulgarian codeword “Pandem” or pandemic.¹⁵⁷ Thus, HVA/X not only called the Harare brochure their active measure; they also provided the Bulgarians with a copy, despite Mutz’s failure to bring one with him to Sofia in mid-September 1986 and the

154. See, for example, Selvage, “SA-CIA-HVA,” p. 133.

155. Geißler, “Es gab keine AIDS-Verschwörung,” p. 106.

156. See the records of various discussions between HVA/X and its counterparts in Prague, along with lists of publications that were sent in both directions after the meetings, in ABS, a. č. 81282/103, 81282/107, 81282/111, and 81282/117.

157. Stankov, Work Plan for 1987, 6 January 1987, pp. 477–478.

brochure's apparent absence in the Stasi files following the destruction of most of the HVA's records.¹⁵⁸

Still, despite HVA/X's secret, official assertions to its Bulgarian counterparts, Geissler and Sprinkle insist on offering an alternative explanation that precludes a Stasi role in the origins and distribution of the Harare brochure. They argue that a certain professor in Cameroon, to whom Segal had sent a copy of his study in June 1986, had subsequently handed it off to "African journalists" who had then arranged both for its publication as a brochure and for its subsequent distribution during the NAM summit in Harare.¹⁵⁹ Segal later wrote with regard to the brochure that unnamed "African journalists" had put it together and arranged for its publication.¹⁶⁰ The Harare brochure, Geissler and Sprinkle conclude, had resulted exclusively from the efforts of the Cameroonian professor, unknown "African journalists," and Segal himself. The implication they draw is that HVA/X need not have played—and, given the absence of evidence in the Stasi archives, did not play—any role.¹⁶¹

This alternative explanation has egregious problems. The only evidence of the Cameroonian professor's role is that Segal provided him with a copy of his study and requested that the professor make it known to scientists in his country.¹⁶² There is no evidence that the professor fulfilled Segal's request, provided "African journalists" with a copy of it, or otherwise arranged for publication of what became the Harare brochure. Nor is there any evidence that the professor even responded to Segal's letter; at least, Geissler and Sprinkle do not cite such a response.

Furthermore, even if the not-further-specified "African journalists" or the Cameroonian professor had arranged for the brochure's publication

158. True to form, Geißler has made much of the absence of the Harare brochure in the Stasi archives. Despite the destruction of around 90 percent of the HVA's files, he holds that its absence in the archives should serve as evidence of the HVA's absence in its publication or distribution. See Geißler, "Es gab keine AIDS-Verschwörung," p. 106. Because Geißler could not find a copy of the brochure for many years (absence of evidence), he even began to question the Harare brochure's very existence (evidence of absence). See Geissler and Sprinkle, "Disinformation Squared," p. 87; and Geissler, "AIDS und seine Erreger," pp. 124, 129. Eventually he did receive a copy of the brochure and conceded its existence in an addendum to his 2014 article with Sprinkle. See Geissler and Sprinkle, "Disinformation Squared," pp. 81–82.

159. Geissler and Sprinkle, "Disinformation Squared," pp. 35, 37.

160. Letter from J. Segal to a Japanese scholar in Tokyo, 2 March 1987, in SAPMO-BA, NY 4516, K. 12, Japan.

161. Geissler and Sprinkle, "Disinformation Squared," pp. 35, 37, and Table 4 on p. 76.

162. See the letter from Jakob Segal to the professor in Cameroon, 17 June 1986, in SAPMO-BA, NY 4516, K. 12.

or distribution, this need not have excluded a role for the HVA.¹⁶³ After, all, one of the central activities of HVA/X and its equivalents in the other Soviet-bloc security services was bringing manuscripts to the attention of journalists and publishers outside the Soviet bloc, whether the latter had any formal relation to the MfS or not. With regard to the brochure’s publication and distribution during the Harare summit, the HVA, which had its own residency in Harare—that is, not just HVA/X, on which Geissler and Sprinkle unjustifiably focus exclusively—had the motive, means, and opportunity to popularize the Segals’ study and effectively confessed to having done so in top-secret exchanges with its Bulgarian colleagues.¹⁶⁴ Such evidence is lacking with regard to the Cameroonian professor.

Newly uncovered evidence suggests the KGB, too, played a role in arranging for the publication and distribution of the Harare brochure—a fact that conforms to the general claims of both the KGB and the HVA regarding their cooperation on the AIDS disinformation campaign.¹⁶⁵ In a 1992 letter, Lilli Segal named a specific African journalist resident in West Germany in 1986 as the “publisher” of the brochure distributed in Harare in 1986.¹⁶⁶

163. The Cameroonian professor had studied at an East German university in the early 1970s, at which time he had been recruited as a “prospective unofficial collaborator” (*Vorlauf-IM*), codename “Herbert,” by the Stasi. However, to the annoyance of his Stasi control officer, he had provided only very general information about his fellow students, and the Stasi had eventually broken off contact with him. The final straw had been the control officer’s suspicion that “Herbert” had failed to inform him about the successful efforts of another African student to smuggle an East German citizen across the border to the West. See IM-Vorlauf “Herbert,” 17 October 1986, in BStU, MfS, AIM 6694/75, Bd. I, esp. pp. 143–144. Still, there is no evidence of a continuing relationship between the future professor and the MfS after he had left the GDR for Cameroon.

164. Stankov, Information (Short Report), 22 November 1986, pp. 123–124. On motive (i.e., the HVA’s desire to help the KGB, which had requested such assistance from its “fraternal organs”) and opportunity, see Selvage and Nehring, “AIDS-Verschwörung,” pp. 21–22, 35, and pp. 58–60 respectively. The implementation and conduct of active measures was one of the main tasks of all divisions of the HVA, not only HVA/X. See MfS, 1. Kommentar zur Richtlinie 2/79, [May] 1980, in Müller-Enbergs, *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*, Vol. 2, p. 522. Each residency of the HVA abroad—whether it was under the direction of HVA/XI (North America), HVA/I or HVA/II (FRG), or HVA/III (everywhere else)—was expected to devote a certain amount of its time and resources to developing and implementing active measures. This was the normal practice among the East European security services, based on the model and practices of the KGB. Moreover, any unit of the MfS could develop active measures, as necessary, for its own operations or in coordination or cooperation with HVA/X. Given HVA/X’s limited staff, it regularly depended on the expertise, unofficial collaborators, and contact persons in other divisions of the HVA in preparing and implementing active measures. This division of labor was normally based on the geographic responsibilities within HVA. In the case of the AIDS disinformation campaign, this expertise clearly came from HVA/SWT/XIII/5.

165. Information Nr. 2742, n.d., p. 157; Record of the Conversations Conducted with the German Comrades from the Line AM, 10 November 1988, in COMDOS, F. 9, Op. 4, A.E. 691, p. 92; and Record of the Conversations Conducted with the German Comrades from 26–29 September 1989, 10 October 1989, in COMDOS, F. 9, Op. 4, A.E. 691, p. 189.

166. Lilli Segal to Benno Müller-Hill, 23 August 1991, in ABBAW, NL Müller-Hill, Nr. 88, Segal 20. Jakob Segal had corresponded several times with Müller-Hill, a prominent West German molecular

The journalist in question worked for an African magazine published in the FRG. The magazine, at least according to the papers of former KGB archivist Mitrokhin, was subsidized by the KGB, and its publisher, who also worked as a correspondent for a Nigerian and a Ugandan newspaper, had allegedly been recruited as KGB agent “Borisov.”¹⁶⁷ The journalist whom Lilli Segal named as the “publisher” of the Harare brochure had also authored articles in African newspapers denouncing theories of a natural, African origin of AIDS as “racist,” and he had been cited to this effect in the U.S. and West European press.¹⁶⁸ Whether and to what extent his activities were influenced or controlled by the KGB remains an open question, and one should not assume that his various publications did not reflect his true beliefs—as is also very likely the case with the Segals.

The Segals’ Study, the Fort Detrick Thesis, and the KGB’s Disinformation Campaign

Whatever role the Stasi or the KGB may or may not have played in the origins and distribution of the Harare brochure, the Segals’ argumentation in their study helped bolster the KGB’s AIDS disinformation campaign. The Harare brochure and especially the review by *Social Change and Development* were subsequently distributed throughout Africa and cited in the local press.¹⁶⁹ The KGB, which referred to the Segals’ thesis in talks with its Bulgarian “comrades,” wrote that the argument had “found overwhelming resonance in the African countries” and that, by “demonstrating the defeat of the ‘African version’” of HIV’s origins, “we can whip up anti-American sentiments throughout the states of the continent.”¹⁷⁰

The Segals’ study not only proved useful for the KGB’s propaganda campaign in Africa, but also helped lend the Fort Detrick thesis a scientific cachet in general with its extensive citations of scientific literature. U.S. Deputy

biologist and professor of genetics at the University of Cologne, during research for his AIDS study. Müller-Hill had first privately, and then publicly and quite vocally, criticized the Segals’ research and their conclusions. See Geissler and Sprinkle, “Disinformation Squared,” p. 19; and Benno Müller-Hill, “Möglichkeiten werden durch Fakten bewiesen,” in Kuno Kruse, ed., *AIDS: Erreger aus dem Genlabor?* (West Berlin: Simon & Leutner, 1987), pp. 44–46.

167. See Mitrokhin’s notes in Churchill Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge University, Mitrokhin Papers, MITN 2/18, p. 22.

168. I acquired this information through an online search of the journalist’s name.

169. U.S. DOS, *Soviet Influence Activities, 1986–87*, pp. 13–14, 20.

170. Information Nr. 2742, p. 157.

Assistant Secretary of State Kathleen Bailey, responsible for combatting Soviet active measures, called the Segal report an “impressive addition” to Moscow’s AIDS disinformation campaign. Although it contained “numerous factual errors and faulty conclusions,” it was “full of technical jargon,” and “to anyone inclined to believe the disinformation, it appears convincing.”¹⁷¹ Specifically, the Segals had argued, like the KGB before, that what became the AIDS virus had resulted from the weaponization of previously existing viruses at Fort Detrick. Like Seale, they argued that the visna virus had been genetically manipulated, but not through the removal of a gene; instead, it had been recombined with HTLV-1.¹⁷² Jakob Segal claimed that he had discerned the genetic engineering of the visna virus independently of Seale.¹⁷³ However, their choice of HTLV-1 as the alleged virus recombined with visna turned out to be more malignant. The leading AIDS researcher in the United States, Robert Gallo, had assumed incorrectly that HIV belonged to the HTLV family, which he had discovered. In the United States, Shively quickly grasped what the Segals merely insinuated. Based on the alleged genetic engineering that had taken place, Gallo, the discoverer of HTLV-1, was the scientist best placed to have genetically engineered what became HIV.¹⁷⁴ Only later did Jakob Segal openly accuse Gallo of having created HIV, but this demonization of the eminent U.S. scientist as the “father of AIDS” became part of many subsequent HIV-as-bioweapon conspiracy theories.¹⁷⁵

The Segals’ manuscript also enhanced the KGB’s Fort Detrick thesis by resolving certain contradictions in the original version. For example, why would the Pentagon develop a virus with such a long incubation period that it would be useless on the battlefield? The Segals’ study also provided important new details about how the virus was allegedly constructed at Fort Detrick, had escaped from the laboratory, and had then infected U.S. citizens. The Segals argued that the AIDS virus had been developed at Fort Detrick by recombining parts from two other viruses: visna and HTLV-1. The artificially constructed virus, they claimed, was then tested on incarcerated criminals

171. Kathleen Bailey, “Soviets Sponsor Spread of AIDS Disinformation,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 April 1987, p. E2. Bailey was U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state, overseeing the Department of State’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research.

172. Segal and Segal, “AIDS—Its Nature and Origin”, p. 13.

173. Letter from Jakob Segal to J. M. B. Seale, 29 May 1986, in SAPMO-BA, NY 4516, K. 13.

174. Shively, “AIDS and Genes (Part I of III).”

175. Jakob Segal’s first-known public accusation that Gallo had constructed HIV in the laboratory was published in an interview in the Austrian magazine *BASTA* in December 1988. See “Der AIDS-Krimi,” *BASTA*, December 1988. This discovery was made by Geissler. See Geißler, “Es gab keine AIDS-Verschwörung,” p. 100.

in a prison near Fort Detrick. The prisoners agreed to participate in the experiment in return for early release. Because of the genetically engineered virus's long incubation period, which the scientists had not foreseen, the responsible persons at Fort Detrick had decided it would be ineffective as a bioweapon. Thus, the test subjects were found to be healthy and released after a period of 12–18 months, before they exhibited any symptoms of AIDS.¹⁷⁶

The Segals wrote that, at this point,

Criminals who had engaged in homosexual practices during the long time of their imprisonment obviously concentrated in the nearest big city after their release. It is therefore logical that, after the end of the incubation period, that is, about 1979, the first AIDS cases should have been registered in New York, to begin with exclusively among homosexual men.¹⁷⁷

AIDS then spread, per the Segals, from the gay community in New York throughout the United States, then to Western Europe, and then throughout the world.¹⁷⁸

The Harare manuscript and the ensuing publications of the Segals contained several factual errors. The gene technology necessary to recombine parts of two viruses to construct a third did not exist in 1977.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, blood samples had already been found from the year 1959 that contained HIV antibodies, which means that the virus had clearly existed for at least twenty years before its alleged construction. Furthermore, New York was not the nearest major city to Fort Detrick; both Baltimore and Washington were much closer. More importantly, neither the Segals nor their supporters could ever present—or even presumably sought to find—any evidence of the alleged test subjects or any agreement for their early release. Nevertheless, Segal claimed an “unbroken chain of indices.”¹⁸⁰

The Segals’ thesis also displayed characteristics typical of conspiracy theories; mainly, errors in logic. First, they attributed to certain actors extraordinary capabilities. In this case, the U.S. government had allegedly developed—much earlier than the rest of the world—exceptional knowledge and abilities

176. Segal and Segal, “AIDS—Its Nature and Origin”, pp. 12–13.

177. Ibid., p. 13.

178. Ibid., pp. 14–15.

179. The U.S. State Department responded as follows to the Segals’ thesis: “The HTLV-I and VISNA viruses were first cloned in 1983 and sequenced in 1983 and 1985, respectively, several years after Segal claims they were manipulated to ‘create’ HIV-I.” U.S. DOS, *Soviet Influence Activities, 1986–87*, p. 36.

180. Müller-Hill, “Möglichkeiten werden durch Fakten bewiesen,” p. 44.

in the realm of gene technology, which it had successfully employed before such knowledge became public.¹⁸¹ Second, an exceptionally large number of individuals—in this case, not only employees of the U.S. Defense Department but also scientists at Fort Detrick; the prisoners who had been used as test subjects; the guards and employees at the nearby prison, including those who had approved the prisoners’ early release; and the doctors who had likely treated the subjects after their release—were involved in or allegedly knew of the alleged conspiracy, and all had maintained the necessary secrecy.¹⁸² The Segals went even further in their study by declaring that the entire mass media of the United States had failed to report on the human experiments and that leading AIDS researchers were abetting the conspiracy (or at least its coverup).¹⁸³ This assertion was by no means original; it echoed the accusations of *LG* in November 1985 regarding the U.S. press’s alleged coverup of Moscow’s Fort Detrick thesis.¹⁸⁴

Third, although Essex retracted his hypothesis within a year, the Segals, despite noting the retraction, continued to cite his green-monkey hypothesis and to equate it with the broader theory of a natural origin of HIV in Africa.¹⁸⁵ They exploited Essex’s hypothesis for a straw man argument. If one did not accept the green-monkey hypothesis, the only alternative, they implied, was their thesis of the artificial origin of HIV at Fort Detrick. They further equated all other hypotheses and studies that referred to a natural, African origin of HIV with the green-monkey hypothesis and denounced them as alleged inventions to mislead the public about the laboratory origins of HIV in Fort Detrick.¹⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the scientific work based on an African origin of HIV proved itself to be a “progressive research program,” in the sense defined by the philosopher of science Imre Lakatos: the thesis of a natural origin

181. Cass R. Sunstein and Adrian Vermeule, “Conspiracy Theories,” *University of Chicago Law School Public Law and Legal Theory Research Paper Series*, Vol. 199 (2008), p. 5.

182. Michael Shermer, “Conspiracy Theory Detector,” *Scientific American*, Vol. 303, No. 6 (December 2010), p. 102.

183. The Segals wrote: “There was a danger of popular mass protest against the preparation of biological warfare. This explains why the media, which had at first operated with prognoses of approximately 5 million patients, for purposes of sensation mongering, suddenly screwed back their estimates to a mere 2 to 300,000 patients, ‘to avoid panic.’” Segal and Segal, “AIDS—Its Nature and Origin, p. 17.

184. “Pochemu mlochit pressa SShA,” p. 2.

185. Jakob Segal and Lilli Segal, “AIDS—Natur und Ursprung,” in Kruse, ed., *AIDS: Erreger aus dem Genlabor?*, p. 103.

186. See, for example, *ibid.*, pp. 103–106.

in Africa helped explain more and more about the epidemiology of AIDS.¹⁸⁷ New findings with regard to retroviruses in primates and people in and outside Africa served as further confirmation of the natural origins of HIV. The Segals' thesis, in contrast, turned out to be a "degenerative research program"; that is, one in which the supporters of a thesis seek to defend it in its original form despite that form's inability to explain new developments and new findings—another typical characteristic of conspiracy theories.¹⁸⁸

Most scientists could and did identify serious problems with the Segals' study—and not only in the West. The KGB and Stasi searched in vain for Soviet and East German scientists who would lend their voices in support of the Segals and their work; in the end, none volunteered.¹⁸⁹ Most Soviet and East German scientists believed in a natural origin of HIV, even if they considered the African hypothesis unproven, and in East Berlin, where the Segals lived and worked, they received a dressing-down in a private symposium with molecular biologists and leading AIDS researchers in the GDR.¹⁹⁰ After the head of the AIDS Advisory Group of the GDR Health Ministry, Niels Sönnichsen, suggested in an interview with the West German press that the Segals' "hypothesis" was incorrect, Jakob Segal, supported behind the scenes by the Stasi, obtained a ban on his East German detractors offering any further commentaries or publications in the West regarding the origins of AIDS. Nonetheless, after 1989, Segal claimed a dissident status for himself in the GDR by citing the government's refusal to permit the publication of his thesis inside the GDR. This was at best a half-truth. Publications regarding the origins of HIV had been banned inside the GDR—a ban apparently imposed by East German leader Erich Honecker personally. Thus, Segal actually had a special status. He could at least publish on the origins of HIV in the West, whereas East German scientists opposed to his thesis faced a ban on such publications both at home and abroad.¹⁹¹ Still, a few East German scientists violated the ban, and one, molecular biologist Geissler, even denounced the Segals' thesis as an "unsavory political thriller" and "complete nonsense" in an interview with a journalist at the congress of the American Association

187. Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes," in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 126.

188. Steven Clarke, "Conspiracy Theories and Conspiracy Theorizing," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2002), pp. 136–137.

189. Selvage and Nehring, "AIDS-Verschwörung," p. 95.

190. *Ibid.*, p. 84.

191. *Ibid.*, pp. 84–89.

for the Advancement of Science in San Francisco in 1989.¹⁹² Nevertheless, the ban against the Segals’ detractors remained officially in place until the collapse of the GDR’s Communist regime in 1989, and Segal was never held accountable by the East German government.¹⁹³

Witting and Unwitting Multipliers: The International Press and the Segals

The tactical goal of Soviet-bloc disinformation campaigns—in service of the longer-term strategic goal of discrediting “enemies” such as the United States—was to create and further contribute to a situation in which its disinformation would begin to spread on its own to target audiences through the international press, in the mass media, and by word-of-mouth. The aim was to have the false thesis spread from witting multipliers—including Soviet-bloc intelligence officers, agents (“unofficial collaborators”), and selected contacts who knew about the hidden support of the KGB or its allies for the thesis—to unwitting multipliers; namely, contacts who did not know they were dealing with an intelligence service, along with other individuals (e.g., intellectuals, journalists, or politicians), who simply came to believe in the thesis on its own merits after their exposure to it. In the fall of 1986, the KGB’s Fort Detrick thesis, especially in the new, improved, and more scientific form espoused by the Segals, began to take off and spread on its own. The Soviet press and Moscow’s Novosti press agency helped to nudge the thesis along, but so did individuals with known or suspected ties to the HVA. A combination of witting and unwitting multipliers helped to give the thesis momentum internationally.

Although the Harare brochure—and perhaps even more the book review in *Social Change and Development*—sparked a wave of publicity for the Segals’ Fort Detrick thesis throughout Africa, their most important international breakthrough came on 26 October 1986, when London’s *Sunday Express*, a conservative tabloid, ran an article titled “AIDS ‘Made in Lab’ Shock.” The reporter, Alfred Lee, had interviewed the Segals, Seale, and Robert Strecker for the article.¹⁹⁴ As the U.S. State Department noted, the article was cited and reprinted by newspapers worldwide, “from the Baltic to the Mediterranean

192. Report from Deutsche Presseagentur, 17 January 1989, reprinted in Erhard Geißler, *Anthrax und das Versagen der Geheimdienste* (Berlin: kai-homilius-verlag, 2003), pp. 249–250.

193. Ibid., p. 250.

194. Alfred Lee, “AIDS ‘Made in Lab’ Shock,” *Sunday Express* (London), 26 October 1986, pp. 1–2.

and from the Atlantic to the Pacific.”¹⁹⁵ The article reflected the screaming-headline approach that many British tabloids adopted in reporting on the AIDS epidemic; homophobia often played a role as well.¹⁹⁶ Although the State Department suggested the KGB might have played a role in the genesis of the article, the KGB privately denied any involvement to its Bulgarian colleagues.¹⁹⁷ KGB officers did, however, regard the article as a major stroke of luck for their AIDS disinformation campaign.¹⁹⁸ On 27 October, the day after the publication of the *Sunday Express* article, Hans Pfeifer, whose department in HVA/X was responsible for the “Denver” disinformation campaign, flew to Moscow with Lyamin’s replacement as KGB liaison officer to HVA/X, Evgenii Nikolaevich Ditschenko, for a previously scheduled “working meeting.”¹⁹⁹ The unexpected breakthrough was undoubtedly a topic of conversation.

In the wake of the article in the *Sunday Express*, Lilli Segal wrote to a friend regarding the aftermath: “Journalists have been literally pounding on our door for the last 14 days.”²⁰⁰ Among the journalists who contacted the Segals and sought to report on or even promote their thesis internationally were Erich Friedländer, Kunanhandnan Nair, and Heimo Claaßen—all of whom were apparently known quantities to the HVA and thus, at least potentially, willing multipliers of Soviet-bloc disinformation.

“Comrade” Friedländer had been working undercover as “Hugo Lang” for the HVA in Tanzania.²⁰¹ As of October 1986, he was officially serving as a

195. Roy Godson, “Outlook,” *Washington Post*, 25 January 1987, p. B1.

196. Steven Epstein, *Impure Science: AIDS, Activism, and the Politics of Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 117.

197. Philip Williams (UPI), “Soviet Disinformation on AIDS Alarms U.S.,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 20 December 1986, p. B16.

198. Information Nr. 2742, n.d., p. 157. Jakob Segal credited Seale for inspiring Lee to write the article. See Letter from Jakob Segal to J. M. B. Seale, 26 October 1986, in SAPMO-BA, NY 4516, K. 13.

199. “Pfeifer, Hans,” in BStU, AR 2, HA KuSch/AKG-KA HM; “Pfeifer, Hans,” MA-Karte, in BStU, MfS, RoHo, F16; and Note from Colonel Wagenbreh, Director of HV A/X, to the Director of Division X of the MfS, Major General Willi Damm, 18 August 1986, in BStU, MfS, Abt. X, Nr. 1123, p. 8. As the deputy director of HVA/X/1, Pfeifer was the immediate supervisor of Ingo Dams, under whom “Denver” was registered. See OVO “Denver,” Reg.-Nr. XV 3429/86. Regarding Ditschenko, see his file in BStU, MfS, ZAIG 14413, pp. 38–39. Ditschenko had served from 1971 to 1977 as the deputy head of the KGB station in Bonn and from then until the assumption of his duties in East Berlin in March 1986 as director of Division 3 of the FCD in Moscow, responsible for the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Scandinavia. Churchill College Archives, Cambridge University, Mitrokhin Papers, MITN 2/9/2, p. 233, Entry 620.

200. Lilli Segal to Erich Friedländer, n.d., in SAPMO-BA, NY 4516, vorl. K. 12, AIDS+Nazi-Verbrechen, DDR, n.p.

201. At the time, Friedländer was working as “candidate unofficial collaborator” (*Kandidat—Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter* or *Kandidat-IM*) “Hugo Lang” for the HVA (registration number

“lecturer/trainer” and photographer on behalf of the East German Journalists’ Union (*Verein der Journalisten*) at a school for African journalists in Dar-es-Salaam.²⁰² In the fall of 1986, he reported in a letter to the Segals about his success in arranging the publication of a letter to the editor defending their thesis in Tanzania’s *Sunday News*. He also had plans to have his African students at the journalism school assist in securing the publication of similar articles throughout Africa. He thought the newsmagazine *African Events*, similar to *Newsweek*, would be a good possibility. It was financed, he claimed, by “pro-Iranian Shiites, and they have something against the Yankees [Amis].”²⁰³

Nair had worked as East Berlin correspondent for the Indian newspapers *Blitz* and *Patriot*, both known publication outlets for KGB disinformation.²⁰⁴ Before the summit of the NAM in Harare, HVA/X had arranged for the drafting of a book manuscript criticizing alleged CIA attacks against the NAM and the developing world in general. Allegedly, Nair had merely presented himself as the author of the finished book, published as *The Devil and His Dart: How the CIA Is Plotting against the Third World*, which HVA/X sought to distribute during the summit in Harare. Nair, for his part, met with Segal and published an interview in *Blitz* in July 1987 under the title, “AIDS—A U.S. Military Monster: Yankee Business, Not Monkey Business.” The interview, the U.S. government claimed, had already been published, without naming Nair as its author, in the Nairobi *Sunday Times* and then reprinted in the Senegalese *Le Devoir*. In 1989, an English version of the Segals’ study was published along with Nair’s interview in book form in India.²⁰⁵

XV/3791/83). See Friedländer’s “declaration of commitment” (*Verpflichtungserklärung*) in BStU, MfS, AIM 2886/91, Bl. 233. On “unofficial collaborators,” see Jens Gieseke, *The History of the Stasi: East Germany’s Secret Police, 1945–1990* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), pp. 77–95.

202. Hauptabteilung VIII/13, MfS, “Auskunftsbericht: Friedländer, Erich,” 1 December 1988, in BStU, MfS, AIM 2886/91, Bd. 1, p. 30.

203. See Friedländer to the Segals, n.d., in SAPMO-BA, NY 4516, K. 12, “AIDS+Nazi-Verbrechen”; and Friedländer to the Segals, 24 November 1986, in SAPMO-BA, NY 4516, K. 12, “AIDS+Nazi-Verbrechen.” On 2 November, *Sunday News* had published an article based on the *Sunday Express* article citing the Segal thesis. See “AIDS Virus Is Man-Made, Says Paper,” *Sunday News—Tanzania*, 2 November 1986, p. 1. USIA officer Michael Braxton had responded with a letter to the editor denying the allegations in the article—a “pretty dumb response,” Friedländer wrote the Segals. See: Michael Braxton, “Report on U.S. Role in AIDS Untrue,” *Sunday News—Tanzania*, 9 November 1986, p. 4. Friedländer claimed to have published a response to Braxton’s letter. In his letter to the Segals of 24 November, he wrote, “It cost me almost no effort (except for writing it), to place this letter to the editor.” Unfortunately, the article enclosed for the Segals was not in the archival file. The earliest response to the USIA’s intervention I could find in the *Sunday News* was published later. See Ben G. Lyagile, “US Created AIDS,” *Sunday News—Tanzania*, 30 November 1986, p. 4.

204. On *Blitz* and *Patriot*, see U.S. DOS, *Soviet Influence Activities, 1986–87*, pp. 43–44.

205. Selvage and Nehring, “AIDS-Verschwörung,” pp. 73–74.

Claaßen was a West German freelance journalist living in Brussels who contacted Jakob Segal at the end of 1986.²⁰⁶ In 1963, the HVA had created a dossier for unofficial collaborator “Joachim” and registered Claaßen under the file. Since 1983, Pfeifer, whose department in HVA/X oversaw “Denver,” had taken over “Joachim’s” file.²⁰⁷ Claaßen tried to arrange for the publication of Segal’s study in the West German science journal *Wechselwirkung* and in a planned anthology to be titled *AIDS from the Gene Lab?* Claaßen did not succeed in his efforts, most likely because other individuals, especially in the West German press, rushed in and did what he had been planning. In any event, Claaßen has denied any involvement with the HVA or the Stasi in general.²⁰⁸

This type of arrangement, in which journalists or publishers allegedly known to the HVA just happened to contact an author or interview partner whose statements would serve the KGB’s or HVA/X’s disinformation goals was typical of Soviet-bloc active measures. The desire to protect sources and methods, which had induced the Soviet-bloc security services to compartmentalize information internally, also meant that neither publisher nor author, neither interviewer nor interviewee, would know about the potential involvement of the other with the Soviet-bloc security services.

Those who cited or reprinted the *Sunday Express* story also included individuals and publications without real or alleged connections to the HVA. U.S. psychological warfare expert Roy Godson wrote at the time:

Within hours, newspapers, radio, and television stations from the Baltic to the Mediterranean and from the Atlantic to the Pacific gave considerable coverage to the story. The *Canberra Times* headlined “AIDS Made by U.S. Scientists.” Italian dailies such as *La Stampa* carried the report on page one. The second largest Greek daily *Ethnos* reprinted the *Sunday Express* story in its entirety and Greece’s popular radio morning show highlighted it. The media in Brazil, Sweden, Spain and many other countries also carried versions.²⁰⁹

Given the newfound, widespread publicity in the Western mass media for the Fort Detrick thesis, the Soviet press could now join the attack and claim it was merely citing the Western press—the normal modus operandi for

206. Geissler and Sprinkle, “Disinformation Squared,” p. 74.

207. “Pfeifer, Hans,” in BStU; “Pfeifer, Hans,” MA-Karte, in BStU; and OVO “Denver,” Reg.-Nr. XV 3429/86. See also items in BStU, MfS, HV A/MD/6, SIRA-TDB 21, ZV8237870; BStU, AR 2, RoHo, F16, F22; and Statistikbogen, Reg.-Nr. XV 4735/63.

208. Geissler and Sprinkle, “Disinformation Squared,” pp. 74–75.

209. Roy Godson, “Commie Bigs Say AIDS Is U.S. Plot for Control,” *The Washington Post*, 25 January 1987, pp. B1, B4.



Figure 2: “Pentagonovskie SPIDtsialistii,” wordplay in Russian combining the word “specialists” with the Russian abbreviation for AIDS (“SPID”). Drawing by D. Agaev.

Soviet active-measures campaigns.²¹⁰ For example, *Pravda* weighed in on 26 October 1986 with an article that cited Segal’s views based on an article in the Irish press.²¹¹ The wave of publicity following the *Sunday Express* article also served as an occasion for the publication of an iconic image associated with the disinformation campaign in *Pravda* on 31 October (see Figure 2): an editorial cartoon in which a U.S. scientist hands over a vial with HIV in

210. Ibid.

211. “Virus SPID sozdal Pentagon?” *Pravda*, 28 October 1986, p. 5.

the form of little swastikas to an officer from the U.S. military, who pays off the scientist with a stack of U.S. dollars; around the two Americans lie dead bodies, apparently killed by the virus. The caption reads, “The AIDS virus. A grave illness, for which no means of treatment have yet been found. According to Western scientists, it was created in the laboratories of the Pentagon. (From newspapers.)”

Conclusion

The HIV-as-U.S.-bioweapon thesis did not originate with the Stasi and KGB, as some authors have suggested. The conspiracy theory was already circulating within the gay community in the United States in the first half of 1983. The KGB, without the assistance or participation of the Stasi, apparently picked up on the conspiracy theory and revised it to its own ends by specifying the location at which the alleged weaponization of HIV had taken place: the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases in Fort Detrick, Maryland. The Fort Detrick thesis of the origin of AIDS first appeared in the Indian newspaper *Patriot*, a purveyor of KGB disinformation, in July 1983. It reappeared in *LG*, the Soviet newspaper known to be a front for KGB disinformation, on 30 October 1985, after the KGB had decided to launch a worldwide disinformation campaign based on the Fort Detrick thesis.

The KGB’s Fort Detrick variant of the HIV-as-U.S.-bioweapon thesis would not have taken off after 1985—and would likely not continue to circulate today—if not for the operational environment of the time. This included ongoing scientific disputes about the origins of AIDS, the lack of effective medications to combat the disease, the rapid spread of the pandemic and the ensuing panic, the lagging response of the Reagan administration to the AIDS crisis, and various revelations in the 1970s about U.S. government misdeeds (e.g., the Tuskegee syphilis study, the CIA’s experimentation with LSD, and CIA preparation of various toxins for assassination attempts). All these factors contributed to individuals’ willingness to accept and believe in such conspiracy theories.

Just as important, individuals in the United States, many of whom had already been spreading the HIV-as-U.S.-bioweapon thesis, picked up on the KGB’s Fort Detrick variant and began to spread it as well. A cycle of misinformation and disinformation arose between conspiracy theorists in the United States and the United Kingdom, on the one hand, and publications associated with KGB disinformation, on the other, as they began to cite one another. Particularly important in this regard were individuals associated with

Lyndon LaRouche. Two variants of the HIV-as-U.S.-bioweapon thesis even “coevolved” between LaRouche’s associates and the KGB, as each apparently borrowed elements for their own, evolving conspiracy theories from the other. The full-blown version of the conspiracy theory associated with LaRouche, authored and propounded by Robert and Theodore Strecker, endorsed Moscow’s proposed location for HIV’s weaponization at Fort Detrick but gave it an anti-Soviet twist by blaming the allegedly Communist-infiltrated NIH and the UN’s WHO for the engineering of HIV and its subsequent spread. Moscow, for its part, quoted various assertions from individuals associated with LaRouche to “prove” various aspects of its Fort Detrick thesis. The public, ongoing debate between Moscow and LaRouche’s associates over HIV’s origins helped to popularize the Fort Detrick thesis and to publicize both sides’ accusations against the U.S. government. By propagating the Fort Detrick thesis, the KGB not only strengthened the attacks of crackpot conspiracy theorists against the U.S. government but also lent support to individual conspiracy theorists on the far left and in the gay and African-American communities who blamed the U.S. government for the creation of HIV/AIDS. The various references to Fort Detrick and the Segals’ thesis in the Washington-based *CAIB*, which often purveyed Soviet disinformation, and in the alternative press at the time suggest at least indirect KGB influencing of left-of-center conspiracy theorists in the United States.

A turning point for the KGB’s Fort Detrick thesis internationally came in August–September 1986 with the copying and distribution of the brochure *AIDS: USA Home-Made Evil, NOT out of AFRICA* before and during the summit conference of the NAM in Harare, Zimbabwe. First, the Segals’ study, contained in the brochure, resolved certain internal contradictions in the original Fort Detrick thesis, partly by revising it, and lent the KGB’s thesis of HIV’s origins a certain scientific respectability. Second, the study, its distribution during the NAM summit, and the ensuing review of it in Zimbabwe’s *Social Change and Development* helped to popularize the Fort Detrick thesis among journalists and politicians in the developing world, who contributed to its further spread. The Fort Detrick thesis as presented by the Segals was especially popular in Africa, where it served as an alternative to the hypothesis, increasingly accepted among Western scientists, of a natural origin of HIV in the form of a predecessor virus among non-human primates in Africa. Many African scientists and politicians considered the hypothesis of an African origin of HIV to be racist, especially given the limited understanding of HIV at the time. The Segals’ version of the Fort Detrick thesis received an even stronger boost with the publication of the article “AIDS Sensation” in the London *Sunday Express* at the end of October 1986. As was often the case

during the AIDS disinformation campaign, journalists and others in the West stepped in and unwittingly did the KGB's, or the Stasi's, work for them.

The extent to which the Segals worked for the KGB or Stasi—or were manipulated by one or both of them into beginning their research and reaching Moscow's desired conclusion—has been a matter of contention among scholars. The Segals' relationship to the KGB in the 1980s, if any, remains unclear. We know only that Jakob Segal was influenced in his research by the articles in *Patriot* and *LG* that the KGB sought to popularize and that the available archival evidence in Sofia and East Berlin does not confirm the assertion, based on Bohnsack's claims, that Segal was a mere “dupe” of the Stasi, manipulated by the HVA into publishing what it wanted.²¹²

Segal claimed to have begun his research on his own, without any influence from the Stasi, in the summer of 1985.²¹³ The only evidence that contradicts this is the single assertion by the HVA/X deputy chief Mutz to his Bulgarian counterparts in September 1986 that the HVA had somehow “attracted” Segal to his research. The HVA/SWT apparently gave Segal at least one piece of advice regarding his research (no later than July 1986), but this is far from proof of ongoing manipulation of Segal or his research. Segal clearly built on the Fort Detrick thesis of HIV's origins espoused by the KGB, but he went about proving it—or at least recasting it—in a “scientific” fashion. There is no reason to doubt that the final product of his research was the result of his own intellectual exertions in cooperation with his wife, Lilli. To dub him a manipulated “dupe” or “useful idiot” for the MfS not only goes beyond the existing evidence; it also disregards Segal's agency as a willing propagandist against Western “imperialism” and downplays his personal role and responsibility in propagating the Fort Detrick myth until his death in 1995.²¹⁴

At the same time, in light of Mutz's subsequent, documented claim and HVA/SWT's apparent advice to Segal on at least one occasion, the HVA may have played some role in Segal's decision to begin his research and might have sought to influence or support him with some form of covert research assistance behind the scenes. Pace Geissler and Sprinkle, the absence of relevant records in the Stasi archives, given that some 90 percent of the HVA materials were destroyed, does not disprove (“disconfirm”) a Stasi role.²¹⁵ Based on the

212. See Boghardt, “Operation INFektION,” p. 9.

213. See Segal to an East German geneticist, 17 July 1987.

214. Boghardt, “Operation INFektION,” p. 12; Selvage and Nehring, “AIDS-Verschwörung,” pp. 46–54, 117–125; Geissler and Sprinkle, “Disinformation Squared,” pp. 13–14; and Geissler, “Lieber AIDS,” pp. 96–97.

215. Geissler and Sprinkle, “Disinformation Squared,” p. 76, Table 4.

best evidence available to date, Segal began his research with little or, more likely, no prompting from the Stasi; received only one piece of advice from HVA/SWT, which he may well have ignored; and produced his AIDS study largely or completely on his own with the assistance of his wife, Lilli. Given HVA/SWT’s advice to him regarding his research, Segal likely knew or could have surmised that the Stasi was interested in his research for its own purposes, including propaganda abroad.

This brings us back to HVA/X’s claim that the publication and distribution of the Harare brochure was “their” active measure, carried out as part of their Operation “Denver.” HVA/X had the motives, means, and opportunity to arrange for the copying and distribution of the brochure in Harare, and Mutz effectively confessed HVA/X’s role in his discussions with his Bulgarian counterparts. New evidence suggests that the KGB likely also played a role in the brochure’s production. Given the KGB’s subsequent crediting of the HVA for its role in the disinformation campaign in the years 1985–1986, Mutz’s assertion rings true, even if HVA/X made use of a KGB “channel” in West Germany, “Borisov,” for the brochure’s production. There is no reason to ignore the evidence in the Bulgarian archives regarding HVA/X’s role in the publication and distribution of the Harare brochure; the evidence present in Sofia outweighs the alleged absence of evidence in the Stasi archives cited by Geissler and Sprinkle.

Nevertheless, the HVA clearly played only a supporting role in the KGB’s AIDS disinformation campaign in the years 1985–1986—for example, by “securing” the Segals and keeping watch over their ongoing research; gathering relevant information for the KGB regarding Western reactions to Moscow’s AIDS disinformation; arranging for the publication and distribution of the Harare brochure in cooperation with the KGB; and apparently bringing certain journalists together with the Segals for interviews after the *Sunday Express* article. The HVA and the Stasi in general played a more engaged, active role in the KGB’s AIDS disinformation campaign in the years 1987–1989, as a follow-up article will demonstrate.